A SPAHI'S LOVE-STORY

THIS EDITION OF
A SPAHI'S LOVE STORY
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BOB
DEAN

A SPAHI'S LOVE-STORY

FROM THE FRENCH OF

PIERRE LOTI

MEMBER OF THE FRENCH ÂCADEMY

WITH FRONTISPIECE IN COLOR BY

ROBERT DEAN

AND SIX ETCHINGS BY

GASTON TRILLEAU

PARIS

CHARLES CARRINGTON

1907

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INTRODUCTION

I

A VERY eminent French critic writing, some twenty years ago, about the half-dozen novels which Pierre Loti had then published, confessed his inability to analyse the very deep impression they had made on his mind, and acknowledged that his critical conscience was much disturbed by the phenomenon.

"The greatest masterpieces of literature have never troubled me thus," he says. "What is there then in Loti's stories? They are written nonchalantly, in a limited vocabulary, and in short sentences of a very uniform nature. You will not find in any of the tales any exceptional or powerful drama, nor subtle psychology; the whole plot is reduced to a love-affair followed by a separation, and all the personages have very simple characters. Many books, both old and new, have required a very different effort of thought, invention, and execution. But, in spite of all that, Loti's novels intrude upon me and oppress me more than would a drama by Shakespeare, a tragedy by Racine, or a story by Balzac. And that is what disturbs me. Is there a spell about them—some witchcraft—a charm which cannot be explained, or which can be explained, otherwise than by literary merit?"*

Having confessed that the peculiar charm of Pierre Loti's books cannot be explained, M. Jules Lemaître thereupon devotes some twenty odd pages to explaining it, but not, as it seems to me, very happily, or at least not completely. "Long voyages amidst the infinite solitude of the seas, the persistent idea of the

* Jules Lemaître. *Les Contemporains.*

immensity of the universe and the fatality of natural forces, slowly fill the mind with undefinable sadness. That feeling may turn to serious piety in some, and to a resigned fatalism in others." But there are many hundreds of warships, of all nations, and containing many thousands of naval officers—to say nothing of the merchant service, which is equally affected by the immensity of the universe and the fatality of natural forces—and there is only one Pierre Loti.

Nor do I think that his peculiar charm is to be explained by the fact that he takes his readers to foreign climes where they would be lost but for his guidance. Still less can I agree with the jerky *obiter dicta* of a lady-critic, who sees in Loti "an outcome of the Boulevard such as it was in the past"; nor do I find in him aught but a very remote resemblance to Gautier. If I were obliged to compare him to anybody it would not be to a writer but to a painter—Millet. We all of us know the celebrated picture, the Angelus. Two peasants, a man and a woman, are engaged in field-work—digging potatoes or something equally prosaic—and as the sound of the evening bell drifts to them across the level landscape, the man doffs his hat, and the woman crosses herself. The characters and the incident are commonplace enough, but yet there is something about the picture which goes straight to the heart.*

* I was unaware when I penned the above lines that Pierre Loti had written a delightful bit of word-painting on the same subject, which reads as though it were inspired by Millet's picture. It is in *Le Roman d'un Enfant.*

"Oh the Angelus of Echellais heard in that garden on those fine evenings long ago! Oh the sound of that bell, cracked but silvery still, like those very old voices which have been lovely and are still sweet! What a charm of days gone by, of pensive contemplation, and of quiet death, that sound shed through the limpid darkness of the land. The bell rang for a long while, varying in the distance, now muffled, now clear, at the caprice of the soft breaths which stirred the air. I thought of all the people who must be listening to it on the lonely farms."

What is the secret of this strangely fascinating melancholy, which imbues Millet's canvas and Loti's page? I can hardly hope to solve a problem which (in the case of Loti) has baffled such an astute and experienced critic as M. Jules Lemaître, but, perhaps, if we glance at a few details of the author's life, we may see partly how the circumstances of his birth and training have moulded his genius.

II

Louis Marie Julien Viaud was born at Rochefort, 14th January, 1850. His ancestors were Huguenots, who had taken refuge in Brittany during some religious persecution, and had lived there for several generations. His parents were rigid Protestants—perhaps a trifle hard, as very pious persons are apt to be,—but Julien's boyhood was not an unhappy one, and he had several aunts and other female relatives who spoiled him, and made him wish that he "could remain a boy all his life."

At school, he was merely an ordinary scholar, and

displayed no marked abilities. He collected shells and other trifling curiosities from foreign lands—an early manifestation of "exoticism" his admirers say—but scores of schoolboys, and very ordinary ones, have done the same. He was pious, and his first ambition was to be a *pasteur*, but he longed to see foreign lands. and therefore he thought he would be a missionary. One day, he chanced to come across an old log-book, and the dry descriptions of tropical seas and skies stirred his fancy. He announced his resolve to join the Navy, and his parents, though inwardly grieved—for his elder brother had also been in the Navy, and died at sea—did not seriously oppose his determination. They sent him to the Naval College, where he had to make up a good deal of lost ground, but was greatly helped by one of his aunts—Aunt Claire—who taught herself Greek in order to be able to assist him. His favourite place of study was the staircase, on which he used to lie with his head lower than his feet, while Aunt Claire sat beside him and coached him. Thanks to her and his two professors —"the Bull Apis" and "the Big Black Monkey," as he ungratefully called them—he passed his examination, and at the age of seventeen became a naval cadet on the *Borda*.

During the next ten or eleven years, he was cruising in all parts of the world. Hitherto he had shown no sign of literary talent—in fact, when at the Naval College he was required to write a short essay on "A Shipwreck," he sent up his paper with the title written at the top of the page, and his name at the bottom,—and nothing between them. But at

some time during these cruises, he took to jotting down his impressions, and wrote a novel—*Aziyadé*—which he sent to Calmann-Lévy, who published it. He did not put any name to it, and anonymous works seldom make a hit in France, so *Aziyadé* passed almost unnoticed, but the young naval officer was not discouraged and sent another novel—*Rarahu*.

The MS. of that novel was lying in Calmann-Lévy's desk when Madame Adam asked that publisher if he had any story he could recommend for publication in *La Nouvelle Revue*. He handed her *Rarahu*, which she read with pleasure, and passed it on to Dumas *fils* and Alphonse Daudet, who were also much struck by the originality and power displayed. From that time, the author's reputation was made, but it was necessary he should have a name, if it were only a *nom de plume*, and he chose that of Loti (which means in Tahitan, "a flower") which had been bestowed upon him by Queen Pomaré. In 1891, at the early age of forty-one, he was elected a Member of the French Academy—the highest honour a French literary man can attain,—and as he was serving on board ship at the time, he was spared the unpleasant penance inflicted on candidates of having to canvass the Academicians and solicit their vote and interest.

For more than a quarter of a century he has continued to pour forth romances and picturesque descriptions of places visited in his travels, without showing any signs of diminution of power. In all there is same glowing force of description, tempered with a pessimistic idealism, and a vague

melancholy. There is something in him of the Byronic heroes—Childe Harold, Manfred, Lara—something of Châteaubriand, something of Kipling, something of Sir Thomas Browne, something of Matthew Arnold, and very much that is—and cannot be anything but—Pierre Loti.

All his works, since the first one, have been successful, though some much more so than others, and I wish it were possible to ask some thousands of his myriad readers their motives for admiring his books. It cannot be for his realism, for he is the very antithesis to realistic, and his speech on his election to the Academy was an onslaught on Zola and his school. It cannot be for psychology, for his books have hardly a trace of it; and indeed a naval officer, incessantly on duty, has few opportunities of studying men, and still fewer of studying women. It cannot be for invention of plots; his plots are almost childishly simple and are mostly a love affair and a separation by death or departure—a falling together and a falling apart. It cannot be for characterization; personages with the same name and presumably intended for the same individual, appear in two or more different books with totally dissimilar attributes.

But it would be hopeless to try to find the secret of Loti's popularity by testing with reagents—a process which answers very well in analytical chemistry, but is useless in analytical criticism. To my mind that popularity rests mainly on poetical expression. He writes poetry as M. Jourdain wrote prose; without knowing it. In the age we live in no great poem has

been produced, or is likely to be, and man assuages his thirst for that kind of production with the best substitute he can get—poetical prose.

Pierre Loti has also another and a rarer gift—that of making us feel the physical nature and the atmosphere of the distant countries to which he takes us. In *Pêcheurs d'Islande* we feel the sea-stress of the mighty billows of the Atlantic, and the blinding sleet is driven in our faces by the pitiless nor'-easter. In *Rarahu* we revel in the delights of the drooping palms, the blue waters, and the white coral reefs. In this book, we are stifled by the sultry air of the Sahara, and the miasma of the rank vegetation of the African forest. I am not quite sure that these two things explain all the charm we find in Pierre Loti, but if there are others, they baffle me, as they have baffled far more capable critics.

III

The *Love-Story of a Spahi* here presented to the English reader is the most powerfully dramatic romance Pierre Loti has yet given to the public. More than one famous critic has spoken of it in terms of unstinted praise. Lafcadio Hearn, in one of his delightful letters, describes it as "marvellous, astonishing": expresses his intention—an intention never accomplished—of translating the book: and compares Loti to Théophile Gautier. It shows the harmful aspect of the world. The landscape is most sterile, most hostile to man, most lugubrious under its blinding light. The limitless yellow sands are dotted with

horrible negro villages like leper spots, and at sunset the marshes distil poisonous vapours.

The story can be told in a few words. Jean Peyral, the hero, is a handsome young peasant, living in a village in the Cévennes. He is a bit of a ne'er-do-well, but he is not vicious, and has never done anything worse than potter round forbidden coverts with an old gun. He is betrothed to a charming girl, Jeanne Méry, and when he has served his time in the Army, he intends to return and marry her. But that is never to be. He is sent to Africa, where he meets a negro girl, half goddess, half monkey. He takes her for his mistress, then he finds the position degrading to him and her, and strives to break the spell which holds him to her. Once he has the opportunity, but lacks the strength of mind to put it into execution. He is ordered on an expedition against a mutinous chief; an ambush is laid for the French troops, and Jean Peyral is killed. The description of his death is terribly graphic and forcible. Fatou-gaye, the negro girl, finds his corpse, strangles their child by the side of his body, and then takes poison. The black Venus has triumphed.

It is a world-old story—was old when Theseus quitted Ariadne—but it is ever new, and is now being played thousands of times on the earth's surface, as tragedy, comedy, or farce. Old or new, it loses nothing of its force when it is treated by a mighty magician of the pen like Pierre Loti, as the reader of this excellent translation of *Le Roman d'un Spahi* will acknowledge when he has finished the book.

R. B. D.

FOREWORD

A SPAHI'S LOVE-STORY

FOREWORD

I

SAILING down the West Coast of Africa, a ship, once she has left behind the extreme southerly point of Morocco, runs for days and nights along an interminable stretch of utterly barren shore.

This is the edge of the Sahara, the "great sea without water," which the Moors likewise call "Bled-el-Ateuch," the Land of Thirst.

The shores of the desert extend for five hundred leagues on end without one spot where a passing vessel can put in, without a plant or living thing.

The solitude is unbroken; the same depressing monotony is ever before the eye—shifting sand hills, horizons lost in haze; and the heat grows fiercer and fiercer every day.

And then at the very last appears rising above the sands an old-time city, a few scanty yellow palms waving over its white houses; this is Saint-Louis of Senegal, the capital of Senegambia.

A church, a mosque, a tower, houses of Moorish architecture,—all seem fast asleep under the blazing sun, like those Portuguese towns, that once were flourishing communities on the Congo coast, Saint-Paul and Saint-Philippe of Benguela.

On a nearer approach you are surprised to find that the place is not built on the sea-

shore at all, that it possesses no harbour, no direct communication with the outside world; the coast, low-lying and without an inlet anywhere, is as inhospitable as that of the Sahara itself, and an unbroken line of breakers forbids all access to shipping.

Further you see what was invisible from out at sea,—immense human ant-hills lining the beach, thousands and thousands of Lilliputian huts with pointed roofs of thatch, swarming with a queer nondescript Negro population. These are two big Yolof villages, or rather towns, Guet-n'dar and N'dartoute, separating Saint-Louis from the sea.

Directly a vessel drops anchor in the roads, long sharp-pointed canoes,—nose like a fish, lines like a shark,—dart out, manned by blacks, who row standing. These oarsmen are tall lean fellows, magnificently built, with the muscles of a Hercules, and faces like gorillas. Crossing the breakers, they are swamped half a score of times over and more; but with negro obstinacy and the agility and strength of demons, they right

their canoe again and again, and start afresh; sea-water and sweat mixed stream from their naked skins, which shine like polished ebony.

At last they reach the ship's side, wearing a grin of triumph and showing splendid rows of white teeth. Their costume consists of an amulet and a necklace of glass beads; their cargo is a leaden box hermetically sealed, which contains the mails.

It carries the Governor's orders for the captain; into it are put all communications addressed to the colonists ashore.

If you are in a hurry to arrive, you may trust yourself with every confidence to these boatmen; they will fish you up again unfailingly every time with the greatest possible care, and eventually plant you safe upon the beach.

But the more comfortable plan is to continue your voyage southwards as far as the mouth of the Senegal, where flat-bottomed boats meet the traveller and convey him quietly to Saint-Louis by way of the river.

This isolation from the sea-board is largely

responsible for the stagnation of the place and the general air of melancholy that pervades the country; Saint-Louis cannot serve as a port of call for steamers or trading vessels bound for another continent. If a man has to go there, well and good; but nobody ever stops there *en passant*, and residents somehow feel themselves prisoners, entirely cut off from the rest of the world.

* * * * *

II

In the northern quarter of Saint-Louis, not far from the mosque, was a little old house standing by itself; it belonged to a certain Samba-Hamet, a merchant trading on the upper river. Its walls were of dilapidated brick-work whitewashed over, and these and the wooden floors and ceilings, all warped by the heat and drought, sheltered innumerable legions of woodlice, white ants and blue lizards. Two *marabous* haunted its roof, snapping their beaks in the sun and solemnly craning their bald necks over the long,

straight, empty street, if by any chance someone went by. Oh! the poignant melancholy of this African landscape! The slender stem of a thorny palm cast a thin bar of shadow, that crept every day athwart the scorching house-front; it was the only tree in all this quarter of the town, where no speck of green ever refreshed the wearied sight. On its seared, yellow leaves would often perch flights of those tiny birds, of blue, sometimes of rosy-red, plumage, known in Europe by the name of Bengal sparrows. Everywhere sand, sand, sand! Never a tuft of moss, never a fresh blade of grass, to enliven this soil burnt up by the fiery breath of the Sahara!

III

On the ground-floor dwelt a hideous old Negress, named Coura-n'diaye, the discarded favourite of a powerful black monarch. Here she lived, surrounded by the relics of her former splendour; here she had installed her fantastic bits of ragged finery, her little slave-girls covered with gewgaws of blue

beadwork, her goats, her great horned sheep and her skinny yellow dogs.

Above was a great square room, vast and lofty, reached by an outside staircase of worm-eaten wood.

IV

Every evening a man in a red jacket and a Mussulman fez, a Spahi, went up to the house of Samba-Hamet at the hour of sunset. Coura-n'diaye's two *marabous* used to note his coming a long way off; from the very end of the dead city, they knew him by his walk and the startling colours of his uniform, and let him approach without the smallest sign of alarm, as a person grown familiar by long use.

The Spahi was a tall man, who held his head high and proudly; he was of pure white blood, though the African sun had tanned face and neck and chest a deep brown. He was a strikingly handsome fellow, of a masculine, serious type of beauty, with great shining eyes, as big as an Arab's; his fez was pushed back, letting a

lock of brown hair escape to fall carelessly over the broad open brow.

The red jacket set off the thin, muscular figure to great advantage; the whole man bespoke suppleness combined with strength.

Usually his demeanour was grave and pensive; but his rare smile had a certain feline grace and displayed teeth of an admirable whiteness.

V

One evening the man in the red jacket looked even more than usually thoughtful as he climbed Samba-Hamet's wooden stairs.

He entered the lofty room, which was his, and seemed surprised to find it empty.

They were strange-looking quarters the Spahi occupied. Benches covered with matting formed the sole furniture of the great bare room; parchments written by the priests of the Maghreb and sundry talismans hung suspended from the ceiling.

He stepped up to a great chest mounted on feet, ornamented with bands of copper and painted in stripes of glaringly brilliant

colours,—the sort of receptacle the native Yolofs use to keep their most cherished possessions in. He tried to open it, but found it was fastened.

Then he threw himself full length on a *tara*, a sort of reclining couch of light laths made by the Negroes on the banks of the Gambia River; next he took from his jacket-pocket a letter, which he began to read, after kissing the bottom of the page, where the signature was.

VI

A love-letter surely, written by some fair lady,—a dainty Parisienne perhaps, or more likely a romantic Señora of Spain,—to the handsome Spahi of Africa, framed by nature it would seem to play the irresistible lover's part in melodrama.

No doubt the document will give us the clue to some highly dramatic adventure to serve as opening scene to our story. . . .

* * * * *

VII

The letter the Spahi had touched so lovingly with his lips bore the postmark of a remote village lost in the wilds of the Cévennes Mountains. It was written by an old woman's hand, trembling and unpractised; the lines staggered against each other, and mistakes were not wanting. It ran :—

"My dear son,

"I am writing this letter to give you news of our health, which at present is fairly good, and we thank the good God for that. But your father says he feels his years, and as his eyes are failing sadly, it is I, your old mother, who take up the pen to tell you about our doings. You will excuse bad writing; you know I am doing my best.

"My dear boy, I have to tell you that we are in great distress, and have been for some time. Since you went away three years ago, nothing has gone well with us; happiness and prosperity both left us when you did. The year has been a hard one, along of the heavy hail, that has fallen on the land

and destroyed almost everything, except just along the road. Our cow fell ill, and we had to pay a deal to have her cured; your father too sometimes misses a day's work, now he is come back among the young men, who do the job quicker than he can; besides we have had to mend part of the roof at home, which was like to fall in with the constant rain. I know you are far from rich with your pay, but your father says that, if you can send us what you promised without robbing yourself, it will come in very handy.

"Of course the Mérys might lend us the money, they are so well off; but we should not like to ask the favour, we could never bear to seem like poor folks to them. We often see your cousin Jeanne Méry; she grows better-looking every day. Her great delight is to come and see us, to talk about you; she says she would like nothing better than to be your wife, my dear Jean. But her father will not hear of such a thing, because we are poor, he says, and also because you were a bit wild in former days. Still I think, if you got your stripes as quartermaster-sergeant, and they saw you come back with your fine uniform, he would

perhaps make up his mind to agree to the match after all. I could die happy, once I saw you two married. You would get a house built close to ours, which would not be grand enough for you. We very often plan it all out of evenings, I and Peyral.

"Without fail, my dear Jean, send us a trifle of money, for I do assure you we are in much distress; we have not been able to make the two ends meet this year because of that hail and the cow. I can see your father is making himself miserable over it; indeed I often notice of nights he is tossing and worrying in his bed instead of sleeping. If you cannot send us the whole sum, send us as much as you can spare.

"Good-bye, my dear, dear boy. The neighbours often ask about you, and when you are coming home. Your friends send you all good greetings; as for me, you know I have never had any pleasure in life since you went away.

"Well, I must make an end; so I send you a kiss, and Peyral too.

"Your old mother, who worships you,

"FRANÇOISE PEYRAL."

VIII

Jean leant his elbows on the window-sill and fell into a brown study, as he gazed half unconsciously at the wide African landscape that was spread before his eyes.

The pointed shapes of the native huts, crowding in hundreds beneath him,—in the background the tossing sea and the everlasting line of the Atlantic breakers,—a yellow sun, just verging to its setting and throwing a last gleam of dull red light over the limitless desert, the endless expanse of sand,—a distant caravan of Moorish merchants,—flocks of birds of prey hovering in the air,—and away yonder, where his eyes dwelt for a while, the cemetery of Sorr, to which he had already accompanied some of his comrades, mountaineers like himself, who had died of the fevers of this deadly climate.

Oh! to go back to his native village, beside his old father and mother! to live in a little house with Jeanne Méry, close to the humble home of his boyhood! . . . Why,

why had he been exiled to this unfamiliar land of Africa? What had he and this strange land in common? And this red uniform and Arab fez, in which they had dressed him out, and which after all made him look so grand,—what a fantastic travesty for him, poor little peasant boy of the Cévennes that he was!

He stood there a long time in thought, dreaming of his mountain home, poor exiled warrior of Senegal! Presently the sun set altogether and darkness fell; and his thoughts grew as black as the night. From N'dartoute came the quick throb of the tomtoms calling the Negroes to the *bamboula*, while fires flashed out in the Yolof huts. It was a December evening; a harsh wintry wind sprang up, whirling the sand in eddies before it, and sending an unwonted impression of cold shuddering over the wide sun-scorched levels.

* * * * *

The door opened, and a dog, with pointed ears and a tawny coat, a native dog of the

laobe breed, dashed in noisily, and began to dance round his master's legs.

At the same moment a young Negress, with a merry, laughing, whimsical face, appeared in the doorway; she gave a little bobbing curtsy as if moved by a spring, a sort of quick, grotesque bend of the body, and uttered the word "*Keou!*" (good-day).

IX

The Spahi threw her a careless glance; "Fatou-gaye," he said in a mixture of bastard French and Yolof, "open the chest; I want to get my money out."

"Your *khâliss!*" (your pieces of money), answered Fatou-gaye, opening wide eyes, that flashed white between the black lids. "Your *khâliss!*" she repeated, with just that mixture of alarm and defiance, which children show, when they have been detected in some fault and are afraid of being beaten.

Then she pointed to her ears, from which hung three pairs of gold earrings of admirable workmanship. They were of pure gold

of Galam, wrought with a marvellous delicacy, the jewellery the negro blacksmiths fashion under their little low-browed tents, where they toil at their mysterious arts, sitting cross-legged in the sand.

Fatou-gaye had just bought these objects, which she had long coveted, and that was what had become of the Spahi's *khâliss*, a hundred francs or so put by one by one out of his pay, a private soldier's little savings, the money he had intended for his old parents.

The Spahi's eyes flashed fire and he lifted his riding-switch to strike, but his arm fell to his side again. He calmed down quickly; it was a way he, Jean Peyral, had, to be soft-hearted, especially towards those weaker than himself.

Nor did he scold or upbraid the child; he knew the uselessness of it all. It was partly his fault too; why had he not hidden the money better? Well, he would have to get it now from somewhere else at any cost.

Fatou-gaye knew what catlike caresses to lavish on her angry lover,—how to throw

round his neck her black arms with their silver circlets, finely moulded as a statue's, how to press her naked bosom against the red cloth of his jacket, to rouse presently the hot fevers of desire, that would make him forget and forgive her transgression.

So the Spahi dropped back indolently on to the *tara* beside her, putting off till to-morrow the task of procuring the money so urgently expected by the old folks in the humble far-off home. . . .

* * * * *

FIRST PART

FIRST PART

I

IT was three years ago now, that Jean Peyral had first set foot on the African continent,—and since that day a great change had been wrought in him. He had gone through several successive moral phases,—surroundings, climate, nature, had exercised little by little their enervating influence on the young organism,—he had felt himself gradually slipping, slipping down unknown declivities,—till to-day he was the lover of Fatou-gaye, a young Negress of the Khassonkee race, who had thrown over him some mysterious seduction, some coarse, sensual influence, some inexplicable charm of art-magic and amulet.

The story of Jean's past life is simple enough to tell. At twenty the conscription had dragged him from his old weeping

mother's arms. He had set off, like other village lads, singing very loud for fear of bursting out crying.

His height had pointed him out as fitted for the cavalry, and the strange fascination of the unknown had made him choose the regiment of the Spahis of Africa.

His childhood had been spent in the Cévennes, at an obscure village buried deep among the woods, where he had shot up like a young oak in the fine mountain air.

The first impressions graven on his childish mind were plain and wholesome,—his father and mother, two fondly cherished figures,—and after them the home, a little old-fashioned house, overshadowed by chestnuts. All this was written deeply and ineffaceably in his memory, in a place apart and sacred.

Then besides these were the wide woods, and random wanderings along the moss-grown paths beneath the trees,—liberty in a word.

For the first years of his life, outside the far-away village in which he was born, he

knew nothing of the rest of the world; for him there lay nothing beyond but the wild country, where the herdsmen lived, the wizards and wise men of the mountain regions.

In these woods, where he would roam all day long, he indulged the day-dreams, the long, long thoughts of the lonely shepherd-boy,—then of a sudden would come mad impulses to run and climb the trees and break the branches and catch the wild birds.

A black memory was the village school, —a dark place, where you had to keep quiet within four walls. At last they had given up sending him, as he always ran away.

On Sunday, he was given his fine clothes, his Cévenol mountaineer's costume, and away to church with his mother,—giving a hand to little Jeanne, whom they called for on the way at Uncle Méry's. After service he would go and play bowls on the broad village common, under the oaks.

He knew he was handsomer than the other lads and stronger; in all games it was he whom the rest obeyed, and he expected

to meet with the same submission everywhere.

When he got bigger, his independence and the continual need to be in activity had grown still more marked. He did whatever struck his fancy, and was constantly in mischief,—slipping the halters to gallop the horses far and wide,—poaching in all weathers with an old gun, that generally missed fire,—getting into frequent trouble with the foresters, to the despair of his uncle Méry, who had hoped to have him taught a trade and to see him grow up a law-abiding citizen.

It was true enough, he had been "a bit wild in his time," and it was never forgotten in the countryside.

Yet all liked him, even those who had suffered most by his pranks,—because he was frank and open-hearted. You could not be seriously angry with him when you saw his good-natured smile; then, if you spoke to him gently and knew how to take him, he could be managed as easily as a good teachable child. His uncle Méry, with

his homilies and threats, had no influence whatever over him; but when his mother scolded him and he knew he had given her pain, his heart would melt utterly, and the great lad, who looked like a man already, would droop his head and long to cry.

His nature was wild and unbroken, but not depraved. As he grew to manhood, he was tall and strong, and looked out on the world with a proud, almost savage shyness. His simple village life safeguarded him from the unwholesome contaminations, the precocious dissipations, all the enervating temptations, that assail the weaklings who dwell in cities. Hence, when twenty came and he had to enter the service, Jean was still pure and almost as ignorant of the facts of life as the veriest child.

II

But presently surprises of many sorts began for him.

He had accompanied his new comrades to places of debauchery, where he had learned

what love meant amidst all that was most abject and revolting in the prostitution of great cities. Wonder and disgust,—and it must be owned the consuming passion of these new pleasures he tasted for the first time,—had turned his young head.

And then, after a few days of this feverish existence, a ship had borne him far away, far over the calm blue sea,—to land at last, bewildered and unhappy, amid these novel surroundings on the coast of Senegal.

III

One day in November,—at the season when the great *baobabs* are dropping their last leaves on the sand,—Jean Peyral had arrived, to take his first curious look at this out-of-the-way corner of the world, where a freak of destiny had condemned him to spend five years of his life.

The strange aspect of the country had vividly impressed his untutored imagination to begin with. Then a little later he had keenly enjoyed the delight of having a

horse,—of curling his moustaches, which grew with amazing rapidity,—of wearing a scarlet fez, a red jacket and a great clanking sabre.

He had realized how fine he looked,—and the knowledge had given him intense pleasure.

IV

November,—this was the *fine season*, corresponding to our winter at home; the heat was less oppressive, the keen, dry wind of the desert had succeeded to the blustering storms of summer.

When the *fine season* begins in Senegal, a man may camp with perfect security in the open air, without a roof to his tent. For six months not a drop of rain will fall; day after day, with pitiless certainty, the land will be scorched beneath a burning, devouring sun.

It is the season the lizards love; but the water runs short in the cisterns, the marshes dry up, every green thing dies—even the cactus, the prickly *nopals* are blighted and

their melancholy yellow blossoms wither. At the same time the evenings are cold; every night at sunset there springs up a strong sea-breeze, that sets the everlasting breakers of the African beach roaring and the last autumn leaves shaking convulsively.

A sad, depressing autumn, that brings with it neither the long cheerful evenings of Europe nor the charm of the first-fruits of the year, an autumn that has no harvest of the fields, no golden fruitage of the orchards. Never a fruit in this God-abandoned land, not even the date-palm, yields a crop here; nothing ripens, nothing but the ground-nuts and the bitter pistachios.

The feel of winter, experienced in the midst of still torrid heat, impresses the imagination strangely.

Vast plains, sun-scorched and sad and lonely, covered with dead grasses; here and there slender, sickly-looking palms rise, colossal *baobab*-trees, the mastodons of the vegetable world,—the naked boughs of which are haunted by tribes of vultures, lizards and bats.

V

Poor Jean Peyral had soon begun to feel the weariness of it all. A sort of vague melancholy, such as he had never known before, the first oncomings of home-sickness, the mountaineer's longing for his hills, the peasant's yearning for his native village and the cottage where dwelt the old father, whom he so fondly loved.

The Spahis, his new messmates, had already clanked their great sabres in different garrisons of India and Algeria. In the drinking-dens of the sea-coast towns, where they had flushed their youth, they had acquired that loose, libertine tone of mind that mocks at everything, which men get who knock much about the world; all had ready on their lips, in camp-slang and lingua-franca and Arabic, cynical jests to defy every accident of a dare-devil existence. Good fellows at bottom and merry companions every one, they had ways of their own that Jean could make nothing of,

and pleasures that roused in his mind only a sick disgust.

Jean was a dreamer,—as mountaineers are. The habit is unknown to the brutalized, degraded populations of great cities. But among countrymen reared in the fields, among sailors, among fisher-boys, who have grown up in their fathers' boats amidst the perils of the sea, we find men who dream,—true poets, albeit voiceless, who are capable of full understanding. Only they cannot give shape to their impressions, are for ever unable to translate them into words.

Jean had ample leisure time in barracks, and used it to observe and think.

Every evening he would pace the limitless sea-shore, when the blue-grey sands shone in the light of sunsets of unimaginable splendour. He would bathe in the mountainous breakers of the African coast, delighting, like the boy he still was, to feel himself rolled over and over by the enormous waves, that left him all covered with sand.

Or else he would walk for hours, for the

mere pleasure of walking, and draw in deep breaths of the salty air that blew in from the ocean. Yet the endless level always ended by saddening him and weighing on his imagination, accustomed to the hills; he felt a craving to go on and on, farther and farther, as though to widen his horizon, to see *what was beyond.*

The beach at dusk was crowded with negroes returning to the village laden with sheaves of millet. The fishermen too would be hauling their nets surrounded by noisy bands of women and children. There were always "miraculous draughts of fishes" on this Senegal littoral; the seines were ready to break with the weight of thousands of fish of every sort and kind. The negro women would carry away great basketfuls on their heads, and the little black children go home, their woolly pates crowned with a ring of writhing sea-monsters, strung together by the gills. Strange, wild figures were to be seen there, coming from the interior, picturesque caravans of Moors or Peuhles making their way down the *Tongue*

of Barbary; at every step was some impossibly fantastic group, startlingly outlined against the strange weird light.

Slowly the crest of the sand dunes turned from blue to pink, the last horizontal rays shot across the world of sand, the sun sank in blood-red banks of clouds; and then, then the black figures one and all dropped with faces to the ground for the evening prayer.

It was the sacred hour of Islam; from Mecca to the sea-coast of Sahara, the name of Mahomet, repeated from mouth to mouth, passed like a mysterious breath over Africa, growing gradually fainter and fainter across the wide Sudan, to die on these black lips here beside the wide tossing sea.

The old Yolof priests in flowing robes, their heads turned to the darkling sea, their foreheads resting on the sand, fell to reciting their prayers, and all the shore was covered with men prostrated before their God. Soon all was silent and darkness descended with the rapidity peculiar to tropical climes.

At nightfall Jean would return to the

Spahis' quarters in the southern quarter of Saint-Louis.

In the great white barrack-room, open to the night-wind, all lay silent and peaceful; along the bare walls were ranged the numbered cots of the men, the warm sea-breeze stirring the muslin mosquito-curtains. The Spahis were out and abroad; Jean had come in at an hour when his comrades were roaming the deserted streets in pursuit of their pleasures and amours.

It was the time when the lonely place seemed most melancholy, and Jean's thoughts turned most persistently to his mother.

VI

There were in the south quarter of Saint-Louis a number of old houses, brick-built and Arab-looking, that were all alive of evenings, and continued to throw long beams of ruddy light across the sand at hours when all else was asleep in the dead city. Thence came strange, pungent odours of negro and alcohol mixed, blended and in-

tensified by the sweltering heat, and at night-time a very inferno of noise. There the Spahis were lords and masters, there the poor red-jacketed warriors resorted to drown their senses in uproarious dissipation, and absorb, whether to quench the fever of their blood or out of mere bravado, incredible quantities of alcohol, recklessly wasting the puissant sap of their young life.

These were the haunts of the ignoble half-caste women, the common prostitutes of the town, and the scene of unspeakable orgies, under the feverish influence of absinthe and the climate.

But Jean felt a horror of these places of pleasure and never visited them. He was very sober and steady, and regularly put aside his little savings of pay, laying by from the first a little store of money against the happy day of his return home.

He was sober and steady, but his messmates did not laugh at him for all that. Fritz Muller, a handsome, strapping fellow from Alsace, who ruled the roost in barracks on the strength of the duels he had fought

and the girls he had seduced, Fritz Muller had conceived a great respect and liking for him, and where handsome Fritz Muller led, the rest followed suit. But Jean's best, his real friend, was Nyaor-fall, the black Spahi, an African colossus of the magnificent Fouta-Diallonke race,—a striking impassive face with a clear-cut Arab profile and a fixed impenetrable smile curling on the thin lips, and a body like a beautiful statue of black marble.

He was Jean's devoted friend; he would take him home with him to his house in the native quarter at Guet-n'dar, seat him amongst his wives on a white mat and offer him his negro hospitality,—*kousskouss* and *gourous*.

VII

Every evening Saint-Louis spent in the same monotonous way, like every other small colonial town. The *fine season* indeed brought a little animation into the churchyard streets; after sunset a few wives of Europeans, who had escaped the low

fevers, would display their French toilettes in the Place du Gouvernement or in the avenue of yellow palms at Guet-n'dar; it gave a home touch to this land of exile.

Standing in the broad Place du Gouvernement, surrounded by official buildings, white and symmetrical, you might fancy yourself in some town in the south of Europe,—except for the limitless horizon of sand, the infinite monotony of the desert, bounded far away by the level uncompromising sky-line.

The promenaders, few and far between, all knew each other and scrutinized one another's dress and appearance. Jean too gazed at this alien world, and himself attracted no small attention in return. The handsome Spahi, who always walked alone, looking so stern and grave, was a source of much speculation to Saint-Louis folk, who imagined his life to have held some romantic love-story.

One woman in particular cast many a glance at Jean,—a woman, the best looking and most elegantly dressed of all.

She was a half-caste, so they said, but so

fair and white, she might quite well have been a Parisian. White and pale, of a Spanish pallor, with hair of a red blonde, such as half-castes often have, and great dark-circled, half-closed eyes, that rolled indolently in her head with Creole languor.

She was the wife of a rich merchant, trading on the river. Yet at Saint-Louis she was designated by her first name only, like any coloured girl, and contemptuously spoken of as Cora.

She was just back from Paris, the other women could see that much by her toilettes. Jean for his part was still too raw to pronounce judgment about such things, but even he noticed, that her trailing gowns, even when they were quite plain and simple, had something special about them, a grace and charm the others were altogether innocent of.

Above all he knew she was beautiful, and as she always let her eyes rest long and lingeringly upon his, he felt a sort of shiver run through him every time he met her.

"She is in love with you, Peyral," Fritz

Muller declared with the knowing air of a man of gallantry and acknowledged success with the sex.

VIII

Yes, it was true, she was in love with him; and one day she summoned him to her house to tell him so.

* * * * *

Poor fellow, the two months that followed were for him a time of fugitive but entrancing dreams of bliss. All was new to him, the luxury of her surroundings, the scented elegance of her person; his ardent imagination was strangely stirred, every fibre of his virgin body thrilled. Love, whereof he had only been shown a mere travesty hitherto, a travesty of cynical repulsiveness, now intoxicated him. . . .

And all this had been given him without reserve or restraint, once for all, like the gifts of the good fairy in a child's book. Yet the thought of it troubled him; the woman's self-abandonment, the unblushing

self-surrender, revolted his mind a little when he dwelt on it.

But mostly he ignored such scruples; by her side he was drunk with passion.

He too began to study refinements of dress and person; he too used perfumes and essences, he curled his moustaches and combed and scented his brown hair. Like all young lovers, he felt that life had only begun for him from the day he had first known his mistress, that all his previous existence had been nothing—and nothing worth.

IX

Cora loved him too; but the heart had little to say in her case.

A half-caste of the Isle of Bourbon, she had been reared amid all the sensuous, indolent luxury of the rich Creole population; but the white women had kept her at arm's length with an implacable scorn that ostracized the *girl of colour* from any participation in the society of the Island. The same racial prejudice had pursued her to

Saint-Louis, though she was the wife of one of the most important merchants on the river; she was simply passed over, ignored, like the veriest outcast.

In Paris she had attracted many lovers of the highest refinement; her fortune had enabled her in France to take a recognized position and satisfy her vicious aspirations under the wing of elegant and fashionable society.

But now she was surfeited with the curled and scented dandies with their gloved hands and enervated looks, their romantic airs and exhausted vitality. She had chosen Jean, because he was big and strong; she liked the great, handsome, rough-hewn fellow in her own wild way; she adored his rude, simple manners, she even loved the feel of his coarse rasping camp-shirt.

X

Cora lived in a huge rambling house, brick-built, and with the half Egyptian look the buildings have in the older quarters of

Saint-Louis; it was all as glaringly white as an Arab caravanserai.

On the ground-floor vast open courtyards, where the camels and Moors of the desert came and camped upon the sand, and an odd conglomeration of cattle, dogs, ostriches and negro slaves swarmed.

Above, endless verandahs, supported by massive square pillars, like the terraces of ancient Babylon.

The living apartments were reached by outside staircases of white stone, of monumental proportions. All this, dilapidated and dreary-looking like everything else in Saint-Louis, a city with a past, a colony of other days dying by inches.

The great reception-room had a certain air of grandeur, which it owed to its lordly dimensions and its stately furniture of the seventeenth century. Blue lizards haunted it, pet cats and parrots and tame gazelles scampered after each other over the fine-woven mats from the Guinea Coast; negro servant-women crossed it, dragging their sandals along the boards with a slow,

indolent gait and leaving behind them acrid savours of *soumaree* and musky amulets. The whole place breathed an indescribable atmosphere of sadness and solitude and exile; it was dreary, dreary, especially at evening, when the noises of the day fell silent and the everlasting dirge of the African breakers boomed from the beach.

Cora's chamber was altogether a more cheerful and modern place. Furniture and curtains and wallpaper, all fresh from France, gave an impression of elegance and comfort, and the scent of perfumes and essences of the latest mode pleasantly recalled the Parisian Boulevards.

Here Jean spent his hours of intoxication. The room seemed an enchanted palace to him, outvying anything his fancy had ever dreamt of in the way of supremest luxury and fascination.

The woman had become his life, his happiness, his everything. Blasée and satiated with pleasure, she drew a refinement of amorous sensation from the subjugation of the young man's soul to her will at the same

time as his body; with her Creole charm and feline grace, she had found it easy to fascinate a lover who was her junior in years, and persuade the raw lad she loved him with simple girlish passion. Her success was complete; very soon he was her slave to do absolutely what she liked with.

XI

A little Negress, a slave-girl from the interior, was a denizen of Cora's house. She had a very comic, quizzical little face of her own, though Jean had never given her a thought. Her name was Fatou-gaye.

She had been brought quite recently to Saint-Louis and sold there as a slave by a band of Douaich Moors, who had captured her in one of their raids in the country of the Khassonkees.

A strong propensity for mischief, combined with an untamable independence of character, had debarred her from any but the humblest offices of the household. She was looked upon as a domestic pest, a little

plague, a useless mouth; it was a pity she had ever been purchased.

Not having yet quite reached the marriageable age, when the Negresses of Saint-Louis deem it becoming to take to wearing clothes, she generally went about stark naked, except for a necklace of *grigris* round her throat and a string of glass beads hung loosely about her waist. Her head was scrupulously shaved, all but five tiny locks of hair, tied tight and gummed,—five little stiff pigtails, planted at equal intervals from the forehead to the back of the neck. Each of these ended in a bead of coral, except the middle one of the series, which bore a more precious ornament; this was a gold sequin, an ancient piece, that must have come from Algeria by caravan route and whose wanderings up and down the Sudan had doubtless been both long and complicated.

Apart from the grotesque arrangement of the hair, the regularity of the child's features would have attracted attention. Here was the Khassonkee type in its utmost purity,—a finely-moulded form of Hellenic outline, a

skin as smooth and black as polished onyx, teeth of dazzling whiteness, two great eyes with wide, jet-black pupils relieved against the bluish-white surrounding them, rolling right and left with extraordinary vivacity between the black lids.

When Jean was leaving his mistress, he used often to come across the little creature.

The moment she saw him, she would roll a little blue waist-cloth deftly about her loins,—it was her one bit of finery,—and sidle forward smiling. Throwing into the shrill, birdlike treble characteristic of black women, a soft wheedling intonation, dropping her eyes and going through a hundred antics like a little love-sick chimpanzee, she would say,—"*May man coper, souma, toubab,*" (Give me a copper, give me a sou, white man).

It was the refrain every little girl in Saint-Louis was for ever repeating. Jean was perfectly well used to it; when he was in a good humour and happened to have a sou in his pocket, he always gave it to Fatou-gaye.

That was not the remarkable feature of

the affair; what was altogether out of the common was, that Fatou-gaye, instead of buying herself a bit of sugar-stick, as any of her little girl friends would have done, would slip away into a quiet corner and set to work to sew up carefully in the little amulet-bags that were strung round her neck, every single sou she got from the handsome Spahi.

XII

It was one night in February, that Jean first felt a suspicion.

Cora had begged him to leave her at midnight,—and just as he was taking his departure he thought he heard footsteps in the next room, as if somebody was in there waiting.

At midnight he left the house,—but presently returned stealthily like a prowling wolf over the soft sand. He climbed a wall, reached a balcony,—and peeped into Cora's bedchamber through the door opening on to the terrace, which stood ajar.

* * * * *

Another man occupied his place at his lady's side, a young man, almost a boy, in a naval officer's uniform. He seemed quite at home, half reclining in an easy-chair with a self-satisfied, half-contemptuous look on his face. Cora was standing and they were talking in low tones. . . .

At first Jean thought they were speaking a language he did not know. . . . Yet the words were French, though he could make nothing of their meaning. . . . The short broken sentences they threw at each other seemed so many riddles, baffling his best efforts to understand. . . . Cora was not the same either, her expression was different; a smile he hated hovered across her lips,—the smile he remembered to have seen on a tall girl's face once in a house of ill fame.

* * * * *

Jean began to shake. . . . All the blood in his body seemed to flood back to the heart; his head was filled with a noise like the roar of the sea; his eyes grew dim. . . .

He felt abashed to be there; yet he wanted to stay—and make it all out. . . .

He heard his own name spoken; they were talking about him. . . . He crept nearer, pressing close against the wall, and could catch the words more distinctly :—

"You are wrong, Cora," the young fellow was saying in the quietest of voices, with a smile that made it all but impossible for Jean to keep his hands off him; "to begin with, he is a very handsome fellow,—and then you are in love with him, and he suits you. . . ."

"True, but I wanted two lovers,—I chose you, because your name is Jean, the same as his;—otherwise I might very likely have miscalled him, in talking to the poor fellow; I am very absent-minded. . . ."

* * * * *

Then she nestled up to the new Jean. Voice and expression were changed again; in the soft, drawling, guttural Creole accent, she purred a string of pretty, childish coaxing speeches into his ear, and offered

him her lips,—still hot with the Spahi's kisses.

* * * * *

But the lad had caught sight of Jean Peyral's pale face looking at them through the half-open door, and his only answer to her invitation was to point out the intruder to Cora. . . .

There stood the Spahi, motionless as if hewn out of stone, his great haggard eyes fixed on them. . . .

When he saw they were looking at him, he quietly drew back into the shadow. . . . In an instant Cora had sprung towards him —with a look of some wild beast disturbed in rut, that was hideous to see; the woman frightened him. . . . She was so near, she could almost touch him. . . . Then she snatched to her door with a furious gesture, pushed home a bolt on the inside,—and all was at an end.

The half-caste, grandchild of a slave-woman, had reappeared in cynical self-betrayal under the envelope of the elegant,

gentle-mannered lady of society; she showed never a trace of remorse, or fear, or pity. . . .

The coloured woman and her lover heard a noise like a man's body sinking heavily to the ground, an ugly sound to listen to in the silence of the night,—and again later on towards morning, a sob behind the closed door,—and a scuffling of hands groping in the dark. . . .

The Spahi had got to his feet and was feeling his way out of the house, while it was still night. . . .

* * * * *

XIII

Plunging aimlessly along like a drunken man, ankle-deep in the sand of the deserted streets, Jean staggered on as far as Guet-n'dar, the negro town with its thousands of conical native huts. He kept stumbling in the dark over men and women lying asleep on the ground; rolled in their white wraps, they looked like a population of sheeted

ghosts to his fevered imagination. . . . But he strode on and on, not knowing where he was going. . . .

Soon he found himself on the shore beside the dark water. The breakers were thundering on the beach; with a shudder of terror he made out the swarming crabs, that scuttled away in serried masses before his feet. He remembered he had once seen a dead man thrown up on the sands, all gnawed and disembowelled by these horrible creatures. . . . He did not want to die like that. . . .

Still the breakers fascinated him; he felt himself irresistibly drawn by the great curving, shining billows, already tipped with the silver light of dawn, that came rolling in, as far as eye could see along the endless stretches of coastline. . . . He thought their fresh chill would feel delicious to his burning head, that death would be less cruel amid the kind, cooling waters. . . .

* * * * *

But then he remembered his mother,—

and Jeanne, his little sweetheart and childish friend. No, he did not wish to die.

He dropped on the sand and fell into a heavy, unnatural slumber.

* * * * *

XIV

It had been broad daylight for two hours, —and Jean still lay asleep.

He was dreaming of his boyhood and the woodlands of the Cévennes. It was dark under the trees, which loomed black with the mysterious shadow of dreams; all was confused and dim like a half-forgotten memory. . . . Then he was a child with his mother, under the shade of world-old oaks, treading a soil overgrown with lichens and fine grasses, and picking blue campanulas and heather-bells. . . .

* * * * *

When he awoke at last, he gazed about him bewildered. . . . The sands were glittering under the tropical sun; black

women, tricked out with bead necklaces and amulets, were moving along the beach, that lay baking in the heat, and singing strange wild airs; great vultures circled to and fro silently in the sluggish air, the grasshoppers were shrilling loudly. . . .

XV

Presently he noticed that his head was sheltered under a miniature tent of some blue stuff, supported by a ring of bits of stick planted in the sand,—throwing over him a patch of clearly marked, ashen-grey shadow, with a fantastically curved outline. . . .

The pattern of the blue cloth seemed somehow familiar to him. He turned his head and perceived Fatou-gaye seated behind him, her eyeballs rolling more nimbly than ever.

She had followed him, and set up over him her best gala-day waist-cloth. Without some such shelter against the sun, he would have been sure to contract a fatal sunstroke, sleeping on the open beach. . . .

For hours the child had been squatted there in ecstasy, softly kissing Jean's eyelids, when nobody was passing near. She dreaded to wake him, to send him away where he would no longer be all her own. She shuddered too once or twice, thinking Jean was dead and not merely asleep. Perhaps she would have been happiest, if he had been; then she would have dragged him a long, long way off, and stayed beside him all the time, stayed there till she died,—holding him so tight, nobody should part them any more. . . .

"It is I, Fatou-gaye, white man; I did it, because I know the sun of Saint-Louis not good for the *toubabs* of France. . . . I know very well," the little thing went on in the most extraordinary of jargons, but with a tragic earnestness, "I know there was another *toubab* come to see her. . . . I not go to bed all night, I want so to hear. I hide on the stairs under the calabashes. When you fall down at the door, I see you. —I watch you all the while; and when you get up at last, I follow you. . . ."

Jean raised his great eyes to her face full of wonder and gentleness and gratitude. He was touched to the bottom of his heart.

"Don't tell anybody, little girl, . . . go home quick now, and don't tell anybody I have been to the beach to sleep. Go back to your mistress's house now directly, little Fatou; I am going back too, to the house of the Spahis. . . ."

And he made much of the child, patting and fondling her softly,—just for all the world as he used to scratch the big tomcat's head, when the creature came at night and rolled itself up on his cot in barracks. . . .

Quivering under Jean's innocently meant caress, with downcast eyes, half closed in ecstasy, and throat parched with desire, she picked up her garment, folded it carefully, and went her way trembling with pleasure.

XVI

Poor Jean Peyral! he had never known what suffering meant; his spirit rose in revolt against the unknown power, that

crushed his heart within an agonizing cage of iron bars.

Concentrated rage, rage against the young interloper, whom he longed to take and break between his hands, rage against the false-hearted jade, whose body he would fain have tortured with whip and spur; all these savage promptings went along with a certain purely physical craving to be up and moving, to run madly from place to place to deaden the senses.

All day in barracks the presence of his messmates annoyed and angered him; he felt their eyes upon him, curious and inquiring to-day, to be full of odious mockery perhaps to-morrow.

Towards evening, he asked leave of absence to accompany Nyaor-fall to the northward of the Point of Barbary to put some troop horses through their paces. Then came a dizzy gallop over the desert sand under a gloomy winter sky; for winter skies there are even in Africa, seldomer it is true than with us, but all the more strange and sinister in that desolate land; one vast

cloud covered the heavens, so black and lowering, that the plain beneath looked white, the desert seemed an endless snow-clad steppe.

As the two Spahis sped past, their burnouses flying in the wind, on their headlong course, flocks of enormous vultures, that were moving lazily over the sand, rose in startled flight and went circling in fantastic curves above their heads.

* * * * *

At nightfall Jean and Nyaor rode into quarters, their horses dead beat and they themselves bathed in sweat.

XVII

But the day's frantic excitement was succeeded next morning by an attack of fever.

The following day Jean was carried a helpless load on his poor narrow, grey mattress to a hand-litter waiting at the barrack-gate to convey him to the hospital.

* * * * *

XVIII

* * * * *

Midday! . . . The Hospital stands silent as a vast house of Death.

Midday! . . . The grasshopper shrills: the Nubian woman's thin voice is raised in a vague, monotonous, somnolent chant. Over all the lonely levels of the Senegal the sun darts down perpendicular shafts of unmitigated light, the wide horizons quiver in a haze of scorching heat.

* * * * *

Midday! . . . The Hospital stands silent as a vast house of Death. The long white galleries and far-stretching corridors are empty. High up on the great bare wall, dazzling in its fresh whitewash, the clock points to noon with its two slowly creeping fingers; round the face runs a depressing inscription in grey letters, that show pale in the sunlight—"*Vitae fugaces exhibet horas.*" The twelve strokes ring faint and feeble on the ear,—a note familiar to the dying, one

which they constantly hear in feverish times of sleeplessness, like a passing bell, sounding thin and attenuated in an atmosphere superheated till it has almost lost the power of conducting sound.

Midday! . . . The fatal hour, when sick men die. The wards are heavy with fetid emanations recalling the floating effluvia from a corpse.

* * * * *

Upstairs a great bare hall, silent save for low whispering voices, faint, barely audible sounds of movement, the good Sister's discreetly guarded steps falling lightly on the matted floors. She looks anxious and agitated, the good Sister Pacôme, as she bustles to and fro, her pale face like yellowed ivory under her great coif. A doctor is there too, and a priest seated beside a bed shrouded in a white mosquito-net.

Outside, seen through the open windows, sunshine and sand, sand and sunshine, far-off blue lines of distance and scintillating gleams of reflected light.

Is he going to die, the Spahi recruit? . . . Is this the appointed time, when Jean's soul is to take flight yonder through the stifling air of midday? . . . So far away from hearth and home, where will it find a lighting place, a refuge, in all these endless plains of desert sand? . . .

* * * * *

But no. The doctor, who has been long at the bedside waiting the supreme moment, has just stepped softly away.

The fresher evening hour has come, and the sea-breeze brings with it assuagement for the dying. Perhaps the end will be to-morrow; but to-day Jean is calmer and his head burns less grievously.

Below, in the street, before the door, a little Negress sits squatted on the sand; she is playing a solitary game of knuckle-bones with white pebbles to ease her feeling of embarrassment when passers-by look at her curiously. She had been there since early morning, shunning observation all she could, crouching into the smallest possible compass,

fearing above everything to be driven away. She dared not question anybody; but she knew quite well that, if the Spahi died, he would pass through this door on his way to the cemetery of Sorr.

XIX

The fever held for another week, delirium supervening every day at midday. It was anxious work still, each time the crisis was renewed. But at last the danger was over, the disease was routed.

Oh! stifling hours of midday, the hours that weigh heaviest of all on sick folk! Men who have been down with fever on the banks of African rivers, know these hateful hours of torpor and unrefreshing slumber! A little before twelve, Jean would drop asleep, if sleep it can be called; it was rather a kind of unconsciousness or semi-unconsciousness, haunted by confused visions, with an undercurrent of pain running on and on through it all. And then, from time to time, he used to feel himself dying and lose all

sense of existence and of himself for a while. These were his most restful moments.

Towards four o'clock, he would awake and ask for water; then these troubled visions faded away, withdrew into the remotest corners of the room, hid awhile behind the white curtains and finally vanished away altogether. Only his head hurt him now; that felt as if they had been pouring molten lead into it; but the worst crisis was past.

Among the faces, kindly or mocking, real or imaginary, which hovered round him, he thought he had more than once recognized Cora's lover; standing by the bedside, he seemed to gaze at him pityingly, only to disappear the moment Jean lifted his eyes to his. It was all a dream, no doubt, like the queer, misshapen figures of old village cronies he had beheld standing there, with wavering, unsubstantial outlines. But the strange thing was, that once he had had the impression of seeing his rival at the bedside, he felt no more resentment against him.

One evening,—no, he was not dreaming

this time,—one evening he saw him plainly, facing him there in the same uniform he had worn at Cora's, his two officer's stripes of gold glittering on the blue sleeve.

Then the young fellow, seeing that Jean knew him, instead of disappearing as usual, took the other's hand and pressed it, uttering the two simple words:—

"Forgive me!"

Tears, the first he had shed, sprang to the Spahi's eyes, and this did him good.

XX

Convalescence, once begun, was rapid. The fever well subdued, youth and a strong constitution soon got the upper hand. But all the same he could not forget the past, poor fellow, and he suffered bitterly. At times fits of mad despair would almost turn his brain, and schemes of vengeance, worthy of a savage, occupy his imagination; but the mood would soon pass, and he would tell himself next how gladly he would suffer any and every humiliation she chose to in-

flict, only to see her again and possess her as in the old days.

His new friend, the young officer, came from time to time to sit by his bedside, and would talk to him much as we do to a sick child, though in reality he was barely as old as Jean.

"Jean," he said one day, speaking very gently. . . . "Jean, you know that woman. . . . It may relieve you if I tell you this. . . . I give you my word of honour, I have never seen her since . . . since the night you remember. There are many things, mind you, you don't know yet, my dear Jean; later on, you will understand this too, that a man must not vex himself so sadly about so little.—Besides, as far as the woman goes, I will give you my oath never to see her again. . . ."

This was the only allusion that ever passed between them regarding Cora, and the promise really had the desired effect of calming Jean's feelings.

Oh! yes he understood very well now, the poor lad, that there must needs be *many*

things he did not know yet; that there must be,—doubtless for the use and enjoyment of more highly favoured folks than himself—quiet, refined perversities of vice, that were altogether beyond his imagining. Little by little however he came to love this new friend whom he could not understand,—who was kind and gentle now instead of cynical, who looked at everything with a calm ease and superiority he could not fathom, and who offered him his protection as an officer to make up for the anguish he had made him suffer.

But what did he want with the other's patronage? what was promotion or anything else to him?—he was a mere boy still—but his heart was filled full of bitterness and despair from the shock of this first chagrin.

* * * * *

XXI

. . . The proprietress was called Virginie-Scolastique,—the Missionaries sometimes hit upon these happy names for their young

converts. It was one o'clock at night and the shadows loomed dark in the great saloon; as is usual with places of ill repute, it was closed with heavy iron-bound doors.

One small evil-smelling lamp revealed a scene of ugly confusion just visible through the heavy atmosphere,—red jackets and glints of naked black flesh fantastically intermixed, on the tables and on the floor broken glasses and broken bottles, scarlet caps and negro head-dresses and Spahi sabres littering about in puddles of beer and alcohol.

The place was like an oven, stiflingly, maddeningly hot, thick with dense black vapours and opaque grey-white smoke-clouds, heavy with the scent of absinthe, musk, spices, *soumaree* and the acrid transudation of black humanity.

The orgy had been both festive and uproarious, that was evident; now it was over,—singing and shouting and stamping all fallen silent; it was the stage of exhaustion and of brutish insensibility that follows on a bout of heavy drinking. The Spahis were there, some with lack-lustre eyes, their heads

fallen forward on the table, their faces wearing an imbecile smile; others still maintained a certain dignity, fighting hard against intoxication, heads up in spite of everything. Fine, bold, energetic faces, the dulled eye still looking out gravely with an indescribable expression of melancholy and sick disgust.

Amongst them, huddled pell-mell, just as chance had thrown them together, the members of Virginie-Scolastique's household,—little twelve-year-old negresses, and little boys into the bargain!

Outside a listener might have heard the far-off cry of the jackals prowling about the cemetery of Sorr, where more than one of the company had his place already marked out beneath the sand.

Virginie herself, a copper-hued, thick-lipped dame, her woolly hair gathered into a red handkerchief,—as drunk as anybody—was sponging the blood that flowed from a fair-haired head. A tall Spahi with a boyish pink-and-white face and locks as golden yellow as ripe corn, lay stretched

unconscious with a broken head, while Dame Virginie, assisted by a black wench, even tipsier than herself, was bathing the lad's wound with vinegar and water. Not that she felt any tender concern for his health, not a bit of it; but she had a wholesome terror of the police. She was downright uneasy, poor Virginie-Scolastique; the blood had filled a soup plate already, and it would not stop, and fear was rapidly sobering her senses. . . .

Jean was sitting in a corner, the tipsiest man there, yet stiff and upright on his bench, though his eyes were fixed and glassy. He it was who had inflicted the wound, with an iron latch forced from a door; he still held the improvised weapon in his clenched fist, all unaware of the blow he had given.

* * * * *

Jean had been well a month now, and all that time he was to be found every night at one or another den of dissipation, a drunkard and roisterer of the first water, essaying a fine assumption of the airs of the cynic and

finished libertine. But he was only a great child still; though he had certainly travelled a terrible road in the last dreadful month. He had devoured a host of novels, in which everything was new and startling to his imagination, and had assimilated the unwholesome extravagance of their pages. Besides that, he had gone the round of the facile fair ones of Saint-Louis, half-castes and white women, with whom his good looks had assured him an easy conquest.

But above all he had taken to drinking heavily! . . .

Oh! you who live the ordered life of home and family, seated peacefully every day of your lives at the domestic hearth, never judge harshly sailors and soldiers, whom destiny has thrown, with natures afire for pleasure, into abnormal conditions of existence, on the high seas or in far-away tropical lands, amidst unnatural deprivations and morbid cravings and unfamiliar influences, which you cannot comprehend. Judge not unkindly these exiled wanderers, whose hardships and pleasures, whose torments and

temptations, are utterly outside your knowledge.

Jean, we say, had taken to drinking; he proved the hardest drinker of them all, a terrible, a frightful drinker.

"How can he do it," his comrades would ask themselves, "when he has never acquired the habit?"

That was just it; "he had never acquired the habit," that was why his head was stronger than theirs, why he could drink more than anybody. It gave him quite a standing in the regiment.

Strange to say he had kept his chastity almost intact, poor lad, in spite of his dissolute, dare-devil ways. He had never been able to bring himself to care for the vile Negresses, who plied their trade in the brothels, and when Madame Virginie's boarders let their fingers take liberties with his person, he would flick them off with his riding-switch like some sort of unclean animal, till the unhappy little creatures had come to regard him as a kind of man-fetish they must not come near.

But he was dangerous in his cups,—a terrible fellow when his head was gone and his tremendous physical strength let loose without control. He had hit out just now, infuriated by some casual jest levelled at his relations with his former mistress; then he had forgotten all about it, and there he sat like a block, with glazed, unseeing eyes, still grasping his blood-stained door-latch in his hand.

* * * * *

Suddenly his eye gave a flash; it was Madame he was furious with now, savagely angry, with the causeless, senseless anger of a drunken man. He half sprang up, fierce and threatening. The woman gave a hoarse cry; for a moment she was in mortal terror.

"Hold him! keep him back!" she panted, addressing the helpless shapes fast asleep by now under the tables. . . .

A few heads were raised, and flaccid, nerveless hands tried to seize Jean by his jacket. They could do nothing to help her. . . .

"Drink, more drink, old hag!" he yelled; "drink, old witch of hell!"

"Yes, yes!" she stammered, almost choking with fear. "Yes, that's the thing, more drink!"—"Quick, Sam, absinthe to *finish* him, absinthe laced with brandy!"

She was regardless of expense, was old Madame Virginie, in cases like this.

Jean drank off the stuff at a gulp, hurled his glass against the wall, and fell back as though struck by lightning. . . .

He was *finished*, *polished off*,—to use Madame's elegant phraseology; he could do no more harm.

She was strong and sturdily built, was old Virginie, and as sober as a judge by this time; with the help of the black factotum and her girls, she lifted Jean, who lay like a log, and after a rapid search through his pockets to remove any last piece of small change they might contain, she opened the door and pitched him outside. Jean fell like a dead man, arms wide, his face buried in the sand,—and then the old dame, after vomiting a flood of abominable insult and

filthy abuse, drew the door to, which shut with a ponderous clang and clank of iron.

Calm reigned once more. The night wind blew from the burial-ground, and in the deep quiet of midnight, rose plain and distinct the shrill chorus of the jackals, busy at their grim work of digging up the dead.

XXII

Françoise Peyral to her son :—

"My dear boy,

"We have had no answer to our letter, and Peyral says it is getting high time we should hear something from you. I can see he feels it bitterly every time Toinou goes past our door with his box, and tells him flat there is nothing in it for us. I am feeling very anxious too. But I am always sure the good God has my dear lad in his keeping, as I pray so earnestly He may, and then no evil can happen him,—and surely nothing in the way of punishment for bad behaviour; if it were that, I should be too, too wretched.

"Your father wishes me to say he can

remember what he was himself in his younger days in the army; when he was in garrison, he says he saw how hard things were for lads who did not keep quite straight, along of messmates enticing them to drink and bad women, who hang about on purpose to lead them into evil courses. I tell you what he says to please him; but *I* know my dear boy is well behaved, and has ideas in his heart that will never let him fall into such wicked ways.

"Next month we will send you a trifle of money again; I think you must have many expenses where you are; I am sure you do not waste your pay, when you think of all the trouble your father takes; for my own part—but what does women's trouble matter? so I only speak of him, dear man.

"They often talk of you of long evenings and over the nuts; scarce a night passes without our Jean being talked of; all the neighbours send you their best greetings.

"Your father and I, dear boy, both love you from the bottom of our hearts; may the good God guard you!

"Your mother,

"FRANÇOISE PEYRAL."

It was in the barrack cells, where he was under confinement for drunkenness and having been brought in by the guard, that Jean received his mother's letter. Fortunately the fair-haired Spahi's wound had not proved very serious, and both the injured man and his comrades had done their best to shield Peyral. The latter was still half stupefied with alcohol; his uniform was stained and sodden with blood, his shirt in tatters; a mist hovered before his eyes, so that he could hardly read. . . . Besides, there hung a thick veil now between him and his childhood days and family affections, —the memory of Cora, his passion and his despair. So it is at certain crises of confusion and dizziness,—presently the veil melts and the old familiar loves resume their sway.

In spite of everything the poor little letter, so true and trusting, found a ready way to his heart; he kissed it fondly and broke into tears.

And then he swore he would never drink again,—and as the habit of intemperance

was not inveterate, he was able to keep inviolate the promise he had made himself; no one ever saw Jean Peyral intoxicated again.

XXIII

A few days afterwards an unexpected event wrought a fortunate and very necessary alteration in Jean's daily life.

The order was given the Spahis to shift their quarters, men and cattle, for change of air, to the encampment of Dialamban,—some miles southwards of Saint-Louis, near the mouth of the river.

On the day of departure Fatou-gaye came to barracks, wearing her blue waist-cloth, to pay a visit of farewell to her friend, who kissed her, for the first time, on her two little black cheeks,—and at dusk the same evening the regiment marched away.

As for Cora, the first hours of exaltation and anger over, she regretted the loss of her lovers. The truth is, she loved them both, both the two Jeans; each in his own way

appealed to her senses. Worshipped as a goddess by the Spahi, she found it an agreeable change to be treated by the other for what she was, a harlot. No one had ever before shown her such a calm scorn, such an absolute contempt—and the novelty tickled her fancy.

But she was seen no more at Saint-Louis, sweeping her trailing skirts over the sand; one day she departed quietly for one of the remotest factories in the Far South, sent thither by her husband on the advice of the family and authorities. No doubt Fatou-gaye had talked, and Saint-Louis had professed itself scandalized beyond bearing by this latest instance of the creature's wickedness.

XXIV

A windless night at the end of February, quite a winter's night,—windless and chilly, after a scorching day.

The regiment, on the march to Dialamban, is moving in column across the plains of Legbar. The men are riding at ease,

just as the fancy takes them, and Jean, who has dropped to the extreme rear, is jogging quietly along beside his good friend Nyaor. . . .

The Sahara and the Sudan have these cold nights occasionally,—nights as clear and brilliant as those of the North, but not so dark and with a more translucent atmosphere.

The whole country lies silent as the dead. The sky is of a greenish blue, dark, deep, spangled with a myriad stars. The moon shines as bright as day, defining objects with a surprising distinctness, in a suffusion of rosy light. . . . In the distance, far as the eye can see, swamps overgrown with dismal-looking mangroves; such is the aspect of all this region of Africa, stretching from the left bank of the river to the inaccessible borders of Guinea.

The dog-star rises, the moon is at its zenith,—the utter silence of the night is appalling.

From the rosy sand rise great blue-grey *euphorbia*, casting short, crisp shadows, the

moonlight defining with a cold clear-cut precision the minutest details of stem and leaf, that give a sense of mystery by their utter immobility.

Clumps of brushwood here and there, and dark impenetrable scrub, making great black stains on the luminous rosy surfaces of the sand; farther on again stagnant pools of water, the mists hovering above them like white smoke-clouds, emanations of fever and miasma more subtle and more poisonous even than by day. There is a biting, penetrating sense of chill,—strange and uncanny after the burning heat of the day; the moist air reeks with the heavy odour of the far-spreading marshes. . . .

Here and there by the roadside great skeletons contorted in the death agony, dead camels sweltering in a black fetid pool of corruption. There they lie, in full light, mocking the moon, parading their flanks all torn by the vultures' beaks and their hideous gaping carcasses.

* * * * *

Now and again the scream of some marsh fowl breaks the infinite stillness.

* * * * *

At wide intervals a *baobab* uplifts its massive boughs in the windless air, like a great dead coral, a tree of stone, the moon bringing out with an extraordinary hardness of outline its rugged antediluvian structure, that somehow gives the imagination an impression of something lifeless, petrified, polished and cold.

Amid the branches lurk sundry black masses,—vultures again! There they roost, whole families of vultures, sleeping heavily without a thought of danger; they are *fetish* and allow Jean to come quite close with the calm confidence of birds protected by superstition. Their long folded wings glitter with a metallic lustre in the moonlight.

And Jean is filled with wonder to behold for the first time all the familiar features of the desert thus made visible at midnight.

* * * * *

At two in the morning, a chorus of howls, like dogs *baying the moon*, but more savage and shrill and strangely forbidding. Sometimes at night in Saint-Louis, when the wind blew from the direction of the graveyards, Jean had fancied he heard such-like lugubrious sounds from afar off. But to-night it was close at hand, there in the nearest brake, the source of the horrid concert,—the lamentable yelping of jackals mingling with the piercing, strident, mewing laugh of hyænas. A battle royal between two roving packs on the prowl after the dead camels.

"What is it?" Jean asked the black Spahi at his side.

A shuddering horror, perhaps a presentiment, haunted him. The thing was there, close by, in the undergrowth; the horrid, shrieking cries sent a quiver of sick repulsion through his bones and lifted the very hair of his head.

"Those, who fall out and die," Nyaor-fall answered, with a suggestive pantomime, "those, who die by the roadside, those

brutes nose them out and eat them . . .," and as he spoke the words "and eat them," he made as if to gnaw his black arm with his sharp, white teeth.

Jean understood and shuddered. Ever after, whenever he heard these dismal concerts in the night, he remembered Nyaor's words and his vivid explanatory pantomime, and, fearless as he was of most things by daylight, he would shiver and turn cold with one of those vague, gloomy superstitious panics, that terrify the imagination of mountaineers.

The noise grows fainter and is lost in the distance; it is repeated afresh, less distinctly, from another quarter of the compass; then it dies away, and the silence is once more unbroken.

Over the stagnant waters the white vapours condense at the approach of dawn, and the damp, icy breath of the marshes seems to pierce and freeze the traveller to the bone. Strange,—to suffer cold in this land of heat. Dew falls, while the moon sinks slowly in the west, grows fainter and

fainter, and disappears. The sense of loneliness is heart-breaking.

Then at last, low down yonder on the horizon, points of thatched roof appear; it is the village of Dialamban, where the Spahis are to pitch camp at daybreak.

XXV

The country surrounding the camp of Dialamban was desert,—vast, endless marshes of stagnant water, or else plains of barren sand, where only stunted mimosas grew.

Jean took long solitary walks, gun on shoulder, now looking for game, now dreaming,—always the same vague day-dreams of the mountaineer.

He loved the river too, and to cleave its yellow waters in his canoe, or to push his way through the labyrinths of the *marigots*, or lagoons, of the Senegal.

Marshes as far as the eye could see, where the calm water lay asleep and steaming in the sun, the banks so soft and treacherous no human foot could tread them.

White egrets strutted gravely amidst the dull monotonous green of the mangroves; great, fat "whistling lizards" crawled over the slime; gigantic water-lilies, white and pink lotuses, blossomed luxuriantly in the tropical heat, to glad the eyes of the caymans and fish-eagles.

* * * * *

Jean Peyral was coming by degrees almost to love this strange land.

* * * * *

XXVI

May had come at last, and the Spahis were merrily packing baggage, gathering together tents and camp furniture with delighted alacrity. They were to return to Saint-Louis and renew possession of their great white barracks, swept and garnished and re-whitewashed, to re-enter into the enjoyment of their pleasures,—half-caste sweet hearts and absinthe.

Maytide! at home in France the sweet

month of greenery and flowers! But here, on the dismal plains of Dialamban, nothing had blossomed forth. Trees and herbage, whatever did not dip its roots into the yellow waters of the quagmires, was still withered and dry and lifeless. For six months not a drop of rain had fallen, and the earth was horribly athirst.

Yet the temperature kept rising, the strong, regular evening breezes had ceased to blow. The 'rainy season' was going to begin, the season of oppressive, enervating heat and torrential rains, the coming of which the Europeans of Senegal note year by year with terror, because it brings with it fever and anæmia and often death.

At the same time we must have lived in *the land of thirst* to understand the deliciousness of the first rains, the joy of letting the great drops of the first downpour soak one to the skin.

And oh! the first *tornado* of the year!—Into a dead, dull, leaden sky mounts from the horizon a sort of dark, lurid dome, a strange *sign of the heavens*. It climbs and

climbs, higher and higher, assuming unfamiliar, terrifying shapes. At first it might be taken for the eruption of a gigantic volcano, the explosion of a shattered world. Great bars of storm-wrack form athwart the sky, rising up and up towards the zenith, stretching one above the other in heavy, opaque masses with clearly defined outlines, like great vaults of stone ready to crash down upon the earth beneath. This cloud canopy is lit beneath by flashes of metallic brilliance, livid and greenish-hued and copper-coloured flames, and mounts up and up and up.

Painters, who have limned the Deluge, who have depicted cataclysms of an earlier world, never imagined aspects more fantastic, a more terrifying firmament.

And all the time not a breath of air blowing, not a movement of exhausted nature.

* * * * *

Then suddenly a terrific squall, a furious lash of the whip, falls upon trees and herbage and birds, sends the vultures eddying in wild

circles, overturns everything in its path. It is the tornado let loose; all nature shudders, quivering and writhing under the appalling force of the hurricane.

In twenty minutes or thereabouts all the floodgates of heaven are opened upon the deluged earth; a torrential rain refreshes the thirsty soil of Africa, and the wind blusters furiously, strewing the ground with leaves and boughs and ruins of every sort and kind.

* * * * *

Then as suddenly all falls calm again. The storm is over. The final gusts chase the last coppery storm-clouds from the sky, sweep away the last rags and tatters of the tempest, the cataclysm is past, and the heavens become pure and placid and blue as ever.

The first tornado caught the Spahis on the march, and a merry, uproarious scene ensued.

The village of Touroukambe lay on the road, and thither all dashed helter-skelter.

Women pounding millet, children playing

in the undergrowth, hens pecking about for food, dogs asleep in the sun, all ran for shelter and crawled under the frail pointed roofs.

Then the native huts, already too confined, are invaded by the boisterous Spahis, trampling over the calabashes, upsetting the *kousskouss* bowls. Some kiss the little girls, while others, like overgrown schoolboys, poke their noses out of doors for the mere pleasure of getting wet and feeling the rain stream down on their hot excited heads. The horses, tethered anyhow, are neighing, squealing, prancing with terror, the dogs yapping, the goats, sheep and all the bestial of the village squeezing into the doorways, bleating, plunging, pushing with heads and horns to get in too and claim their share of succour and shelter.

A deafening, discordant din, men shouting, women laughing, the wind howling and whistling, and the thunder overbearing all other sounds with its great guns. A scene of wild confusion under a sky of midnight blackness, riven by swift, darting, lurid

lightning-flashes; then the rain streaming down in torrents, an irresistible deluge, penetrating every chink in the parched thatch, pouring now here now there an unsuspected shower-bath on a crouching cat or scared hen or a Spahi's head.

* * * * *

When the tornado had passed over and something like order was restored, the column moved on again along soaking tracks. Across the clear blue sky scurried a few last odd-shaped wisps of cloud, rags and tatters of brown draperies all twisted and curled and tormented by the storm-wind. Powerful unfamiliar scents rose from the thirsty ground as it drank in the first drops of moisture. Nature was beginning her work of reproduction.

XXVII

On the outskirts of Saint-Louis, Fatougaye had been posted since dawn, determined not to miss the arrival of the column.

When she saw Jean step past in the ranks, she greeted him with a discreet *keou*, accompanied by a little curtsy of the utmost propriety. She did not like to do more, for fear of annoying him before his comrades, and had the tact to wait two whole hours longer before she came to the barracks to congratulate him on his return.

Fatou was greatly altered. In three short months she had grown into a woman, reaching maturity at a bound, as is the way of all growths in that tropical climate.

She no longer begged for halfpence; she had even acquired a certain timid grace, that bespoke maidenly modesty.

A *boubou* of white muslin now covered her swelling bosom, as is customary for little girls, when they become marriageable. She was scented heavily with musk and *soumaree*.

No more little stiff pigtails now; she had let her hair grow, in due time to be entrusted to the nimble fingers of the native hair-dressers to be coiled into the complicated and imposing structure that crowns the head of every self-respecting African woman.

For the present they were too short for such treatment, and spread out unchecked in towzled, frizzy masses about her ears. This altered her looks entirely; her face had been pretty enough before in its funny little quizzical way, now it had a grace and originality that were almost charming.

A quaint combination of woman and child and black imp,—a very strange and wonderful little personage indeed!

"She is quite pretty, the little lass, do you know that, Peyral!" his comrades told him with a grin.

Jean had noticed the fact readily enough, but for the moment it made no kind of difference to him.

He endeavoured quietly to resume his former mode of life, his walks along the beach and his long rides into the country.

These months of calm and reflection he had just spent in camp had done him good. He had almost recovered his old moral balance; the thought of his old father and mother, of his girlish sweetheart waiting trustingly for his return, had regained all its

old familiar charm, its empire and influence for good over him. He had done for ever with his puerile escapades and silly bravado; he could not understand how Madame Virginie had ever come to count him among her customers. Not only had he sworn to drink no more absinthe, but likewise to be absolutely faithful to his fiancée, till the happy day of their marriage should arrive.

XXVIII

The air was surcharged with hot, heavy exhalations, vital scents of young, growing vegetation. Nature was in a hurry to get through her mighty task of regeneration and procreation.

Of old, in the first days after his arrival in Africa, Jean had looked with the same repulsion on all members of the black population about him; to his eyes they were all exactly alike,—the same simian mask, the same smooth, oily skin like polished ebony; he found it simply impossible to distinguish one individual from another.

Little by little however he had grown used to their black faces, and now he could make distinctions; seeing the black girls with their silver bangles file past, he would draw comparisons, single out one as plain, another as pretty, call one dainty, another coarse and bestial. Now the Negresses wore distinctive physiognomies for him just like white women, and he found them less repulsive.

XXIX

June!—Yes, it was springtime certainly, but a West Coast springtide, hurried, feverish,—a season of enervating perfumes and heavy thunderous days.

Butterflies, birds, all living things had come back; the humming-birds had doffed their sober grey suits to assume their vivid summer colouring. Lush greenery spread everywhere as if by magic; a little shade, warm and unrefreshing, now fell from the leafy trees on the wet ground; the mimosas were covered with blossom, and looked like enormous bouquets,—tufted masses of pink

or orange blossom, in which the humming-birds sang with their little piping voices, like the note of swallows twittering gently among themselves; even the clumsy *baobabs* had donned for a few short days a fresh foliage of pale tender green. . . . In the open country the ground was carpeted with strange wild flowers, fantastic grasses, *daturas* with broad-petalled fragrant blossoms. These were watered by sudden downpours of warm and scented rain, and at nightfall above the high herbage just sprung into existence would circle a dance of fireflies, like sparks of phosphorus, creatures born and dying in a day. . . .

In such headlong haste was Nature to bring all this into being that in a week she had bestowed all she had to give.

XXX

Night after night Jean never failed to find little Fatou in his path, with her towzled, woolly head looking like a black sheep's. Her hair, however, grew fast—like the grass

and the flowers—and very soon the hair-dresser's nimble fingers would be able to make something of it.

XXXI

Many were the marriages celebrated this springtime. Often of evenings, during the enervating nights of June, Jean would encounter the wedding processions, defiling in long fantastic troops over the sand; everyone would be singing, and the concert of all these ape-like falsetto voices was accompanied all out of time by clapping of hands and beating of tom-toms. These songs and festive sounds of negro merry-making always breathed a something of clumsy voluptuousness and bestial licence.

Jean often visited Guet-n'dar to see his friend Nyaor,—and these scenes of Yolof home life and promiscuity likewise troubled his senses. . . . How lonely he felt himself, isolated from his fellows in this far-off God-forgotten land! . . . His thoughts turned with a firm boyish affection to Jeanne Méry,

to the girl he loved. . . . Alas! six months only since he first came out to Africa! . . . To wait more than four years yet before he could see her again! . . . He began to tell himself he could never have the courage to go on living alone, that before long, come what might, he must have someone to help pass his long days of exile. . . . But whom? . . . Fatou-gaye perhaps? . . . No! not to be thought of! . . . What a degradation of himself, what a profanation! . . . To be like his messmates, old Virginie's clients! To copy them and take to violating little black girls! He had always been self-respecting and an instinctive feeling of shame had hitherto preserved him against these base temptations of perverted sensuality. No, he would never fall so low as that!

XXXII

He took long evening walks. . . . The heavy downpours of rain still continued, and the great fetid swamps, the expanses of stagnant water, reeking with the miasma of

fever, broadened and extended every day; a tall growth of marsh plants now covered the tracts of sand. . . . Towards nightfall the sun seemed to turn pale with the debilitating excess of heat and poisonous emanations. . . . Then the yellow orb set finally, and Jean would find himself alone among the desolate swamps, where everything was new and strange to his imagination; an inexplicable sadness used to come over him. . . . He would gaze all round the vast level horizon, over which heavy mists hung motionless; he could not quite tell wherein lay the mournful, unnatural quality of the scene, that had power to wring his heart so terribly.

Above the wet grasses fluttered clouds of dragon-flies, their great wings showing black markings,—while birds, whose notes he did not know, piped plaintively under the tall herbage. . . . And over it all brooded the everlasting mournfulness of the land of Shem.

At these hours of twilight the African marshes in springtime have a melancholy of

their own, inexpressible in the words of any human speech. . . .

XXXIII

"*Anamalis fobil!*" howled the *Griots*, beating their tom-toms,—with eyes aflame, muscles tense, and the sweat rolling down their naked breasts. . . .

And everybody repeated with clapping of hands and frenzied cries, *Anamalis fobil! Anamalis fobil!*—to translate would burn my pages—*Anamalis fobil!* the first words, the dominant note and the recurring refrain of an impish strain, a song intoxicate with passion and lasciviousness,—the chant of the Spring *bamboulas!* . . .

Anamalis fobil! howl of unbridled desire, cry of black human nature superheated to hysteria by the torrid sun . . . hallelujah song of negro love, hymn of seduction chanted in chorus with nature and the air of heaven and earth and vegetation and the scents of springtide!

At the Spring *bamboulas*, the lads mixed

with the lasses, who had just assumed with pomp and ceremony the costume that showed them marriageable, and with mad voices and bedevilled rhythm, sang with one accord as they beat the sand with frenzied feet the wild *Anamalis fobil!* . . .

XXXIV

Anamalis fobil!—The great milky buds of the *baobabs* had burst one and all into tender green leaves! . . .

And Jean felt the African springtide fire his blood too and set it running like a devouring poison in his veins. . . . All this new birth of life unnerved and enfeebled him,—because it was not his life. In the men, the blood that was boiling, was black blood; in the plants the sap that was rising, was poisoned; the flowers of this fatal land had deadly perfumes and the animals were swollen out with venom. . . . In his veins too the sap was mounting, the vigorous sap of two-and-twenty,—but with so feverish a current it only exhausted the source of life,

so that he felt like to die under this terrible rejuvenescence.

Anamalis fobil! . . . How quick the springtime passed! June was barely ended, and already, under the stress of mortal heat, in an atmosphere that had grown unbreathable, already the leaves were yellowing, the plants withering, and the grass dead with over-ripeness on the parched ground. . . .

XXXV

Anamalis fobil! . . . There are certain acrid, bitter fruits peculiar to hot countries, —the *gourous* of Senegal for instance,— unpalatable in our mild latitudes, but which are adapted in a tropical climate to special conditions of thirst or disease,—fruits a man may then crave ardently, and that seem of strangely exquisite flavour . . . Of such sort was little Fatou-gaye, with her towzled woolly head like a black sheep's, the supple shapeliness of her limbs, and her quick, bright eyes, that already knew well enough what they besought of Jean, and yet would

drop before him with a childish assumption of timidity and maiden modesty. It was high-flavoured fruit of the Sudan, ripened precociously by the tropical Spring, bursting with venomed juices, teeming with unwholesome, delirious, unimaginable joys of perverse passion. . . .

XXXVI

Anamalis fobil !

Jean hurried through his evening toilet with a haste that bespoke an almost frantic agitation.

That morning he had told Fatou to go and wait for him at nightfall at the foot of a certain *baobab* tree, standing alone in the marshes of Sorr.

* * * * *

Then before setting out, he leant out, his head in a whirl, at one of the great windows of the barrack-room, to reflect a moment longer, to collect his thoughts, if possible, in a somewhat less oppressive atmosphere

He was trembling at what he was going to do.

He had held out against temptation for several days. This was the result of very complicated feelings struggling within him; a kind of instinctive horror still accompanied the fierce urging of his senses. Then there was something of superstition as well, a mountain-bred lad's superstition,—a vague fear of spells and charms and amulets, a dread of some mysterious sorcery, some compelling power of magic arts.

It seemed to him he was about to cross a fatal threshold, to sign some sort of unholy compact with the race of blacks, that a deeper, heavier veil was henceforth to cut him off from mother and sweetheart and whatever he looked back upon at home with regret and fond affection.

The dusk was falling, hot and oppressive, over the river, the white houses of the old town turned a rosy red where the light caught their walls, contrasted with deep blue shadows; long files of camels were moving

over the plain, taking the northward track across the desert.

Already the tom-toms of the *Griots* could be distinguished and the frenzied chant of wantonness and passion, beginning from far away,—*Anamalis fobil! Faramata hi!*

The hour agreed upon with Fatou-gaye was almost overpast,—and Jean set off at a run to join her in the marshes of Sorr.

* * * * *

Anamalis fobil! . . . Faramata hi! . . .

Over their weird marriage-bed a lonely *baobab* threw its shadow, and a leaden sky spread its dull, lowering canopy of gloom; the air was stifling, highly charged with electricity, vital with terrestrial emanations.

To depict their bridal adequately would call for colours so warm and vivid no palette could supply the like,—would need African words of the vernacular—and noises of nature, the sounds and above all the silences of the night,—all the heady scents of Senegal,—tempest and bale-fire,—light and darkness.

Yet all visible symbol was a solitary *baobab* in a great plain of growing grass.

* * * * *

And Jean, amidst the delirium of his intoxication, even now experienced a sort of inward, infinite horror, as he saw relieved against the twilight gloom the more intense black of his companion's body, as his eyes looked close into Fatou's flashing, rolling orbs.

Great bats skimmed noiselessly over their heads, their smooth silky flight like the fluttering of a black cloth. So close they flew, they almost touched the lovers; their bats' curiosity was intensely stirred,—because Fatou wore a white waist-cloth, that showed up brilliantly against the orange of the dry grass. . . .

* * * * *

Anamalis fobil! . . . *Faramata hi!* . . .

* * * * *

SECOND PART

SECOND PART

I

* * * * *

. . . Three years had gone by. . . .

Three times over the dreaded springtime and the rainy season had returned,—three times the *season of thirst* with its chill nights and wind from the desert. . . .

. . . Jean was asleep, stretched on his *tara*, in his white-walled quarters in Samba-Hamet's house; his tawny *laobe* dog lay near him, front paws stretched out with the animal's nose resting on them, tongue hanging thirstily out of the mouth, eyes alert in the motionless head, both attitude and expression recalling the hieratic representations of jackals on the walls of Egyptian temples. . . .

Fatou-gaye too was on the ground at her master's feet.

Midday, the silent hour of the siesta. . . . It was hot, hot, unnaturally hot. . . . Think of the stifling noontides of July, and imagine greater heat still and fiercer intensity of light. . . . It was December; and the breeze from the desert was blowing softly, as it did with unvarying regularity every day. Everything was dried up and dead. On the surface of the sand the wind was for ever tracing thousands and thousands of little shifting wavy ridges and furrows, like minute writing running vaguely across the surface of the vast "sea without water." . . .

* * * * *

Fatou-gaye lay prone upon her stomach, her elbows planted on the ground; the upper part of the body was naked, in the careless negligé of indoors—and the graceful curve of her black polished back swept unbroken from the arched loins to the wondrous erection of amber and coral which crowned her head.

All about Samba-Hamet's house deep silence, save for the faint rustling of lizards

and humming of gnats; and vast expanses of sand dazzling in the sun. . . .

Half asleep, her chin supported by her two hands, Fatou was singing softly to herself, —singing airs she had heard before, but which now rose to her lips unconsciously. It was her indolent dreams, her sense of voluptuous content, translating themselves spontaneously into queer, sleepy cadences of music; it was a reflex action entirely, the effect all this conglomeration of things and circumstances produced in the little black creature's brain welling over in the form of song. . . .

In the silent, sonorous noontide, the feverish half-sleep of the siesta, the vague instinctive strain, sad and penetrating, expression of the poor child's life and surroundings, paraphrase of the silence and the hot midday, of solitude and exile!

* * * * *

. . . Peace is restored between Jean and Fatou. Jean has forgiven the sinner, as he always does; the incident of the *khâliss*

and the earrings of Galam gold is closed and done with.

The money has been procured elsewhere, and despatched to France. Nyaor has lent the sum,—in heavy, ancient silver pieces with worn devices, which he kept locked up with many more in a copper strong-box. They were to be paid back, when this should be possible,—a source of much anxiety for Jean it is true, but at any rate his dear old father and mother, who had counted on him, will not be disappointed or troubled. Everything else is of minor importance.

Asleep on his *tara*, with his slave-girl lying at his feet, Jean has a certain look of haughty nonchalance, a factitious air of an Arab chief. No trace now of the Cévenol mountaineer; he has acquired something of the proud threadbare majesty of the "sons of the tent."

The three years of African life, which have mowed fatal furrows here and there in the ranks of the Spahis, have spared him. He is very deeply tanned certainly, but his

strength has only developed, while his features have grown finer, more strongly marked than ever in their bold, clear-cut beauty.

A sort of moral apathy, long periods of indifference and forgetfulness, a somnolence of head and heart, interrupted however by sudden revivals of pain and remorse, this is all the three years have effected. Otherwise the climate of Senegal has taken no hold on his powerful organization.

By degrees he has developed into a model soldier, punctual, vigilant and fearless. Yet he still wears on his sleeve only the plain worsted stripes. The gilt chevrons of quartermaster-sergeant, the hope of which has so often dazzled his eyes, have always been refused him. Want of influence in the first place, and then, more than anything else, the scandal, the shamefulness of living with a black woman! . . .

To be drunk and rowdy, to be brought back to barracks with a broken head, to sabre peaceable folks in the streets at night in a frenzy of intoxication, to frequent every

wild den of dissipation, and indulge in every degraded form of prostitution,—well and good. But to have turned aside, for his own sole use and pleasure, from the path of virtue a little slave-girl in a respectable household, a convert duly justified by the sacrament of baptism,—no, that could never be sanctioned! . . .

In earlier days Jean had received from his superior officers very forcible warnings on the subject, with dreadful threats and cruel words. But he had bared his proud head before the hurricane, and listened to it all with the stoical bearing demanded of discipline, concealing under a contrite attitude the mad longing that would grip him to let fly with his whip-lash. But the storm once blown over, he had gone on just the same as ever. . . .

A little extra precaution perhaps for a few days,—but he had kept Fatou all the while.

What he felt in his inmost heart about the little creature was so complicated, that wiser heads than his might have wasted

their pains in trying to render account of it. He just let himself go without an effort to understand things, as if mastered by some traitorous spell of charm or amulet. He had not the power of will to part with her. The veil grew denser day by day that shrouded his past and its memories; he suffered himself to be carried along unresistingly wherever his inclination might lead him; his heart was full of confusion and uncertainty, bewildered by separation and exile. . . .

And day after day, day after day, the same burning sun! . . . Every morning to see his disk rise with inexorable regularity at the same hour into the heavy cloudless sky, the great round disk, red or yellow, which the level horizon enabled the eye to see without any intervening object, as if rising from the sea. No sooner was it up than it began to affect head and temples with the painful, oppressive feeling of excessive heat and light.

* * * * *

For two years now Jean and Fatou had lived together in the house of Samba-Hamet. At the Spahi's headquarters they had given up the battle in despair and ended by allowing what they could not stop. To sum up the situation, Jean Peyral was an altogether exemplary trooper; but it was an understood thing he would wear his modest worsted stripes to the end of the chapter and never get a step further.

Fatou as a resident in Cora's house was a captive and not a slave,—a broad and fundamental distinction recognized by the laws of the Colony, and one which the child had grasped at a very early age. As a captive she had the right to quit her master's service, though *they* had none to turn her away. But once discharged at her own free will, she was free,—and she had profited by her rights in this respect.

Besides, she was a baptized convert, and this gave her another claim to freedom of action. Her little head was as cunning as a young monkey's and she quite mastered the bearing of it all. For a woman, who has

not abjured the religion of the Maghreb, to give herself to a white man is a scandalous act, punished by every form of reprobation. But for Fatou this formidable prejudice had no existence.

True her little comrades sometimes called her *Keffir!*—and that was felt as a bitter insult by the strange little creature. When she saw the bands of Khassonkees arrive from the interior,—she could tell them, when still far off, by their towering headgear —she would run up in fear and trembling, tripping excitedly about the tall maned fellows and trying to get into talk with them in the beloved tongue of her native land. . . . Negroes have the love of the village, the tribe, the little corner of the world where they were born, strongly developed.—And sometimes, at a word from an ill-natured girl friend, the black men from Khassonkee-land would turn away their heads in scorn, and with an ugly smile and a significant curl of the lip, would utter the terrible word *keffir* (unbeliever), which is the *roumi* of the Algerians, or the *giaour* of the Easterns.

Then she would slink away, ashamed and sore at heart, poor child!

But all the same she would rather be *keffir*, and have Jean. . . .

* * * * *

. . . And Jean, poor fellow, let him sleep deep on his light *tara!* may his siesta last long in heavy, dreamless slumber, for the moment of waking is fraught with gloom!

Ah! that waking after the torpor of the midday sleep,—whence did it get its strange lucidity, its clearness of vision, that made the moment one of horror? . . . At first the sleeper's thoughts were sad and confused, disordered and disconnected; to begin with his ideas were dark and full of mystery, like shadowy intimations of some earlier existence. . . . Then suddenly would come clearer conceptions, lucid, distinct, heart-breaking,—bright memories of other days, impressions of infancy reappearing in mental vision as from the depth of an irrevocable past, cottage scenes, peeps of the Cévennes on summer evenings, confused with the sounds of African

insects, pangs of separation, of vanished happiness, a swift, agonizing review of past years, a lifetime looked at as we shall see it from beyond the grave, the other aspect of existence, the reverse side of the everyday world. . . .

Above all at such moments he seemed to be conscious of the swift and inexorable march of time, which the semi-paralysis of his mind prevented his grasping as a rule. . . . He would awake to hear the arteries throbbing in his temples against the *tara*, which acted as a kind of sounding-board, and it seemed the very pulse of Time, the ticking of the great mystic timepiece of Eternity; he felt the hours speeding by, flying, flying with the swiftness of something falling in empty space, and his life slipping away along with them, without the power to stop them. . . .

. . . Then he would spring up fiercely, wide awake, his head full of a mad desire to be gone, a frantic despair to think of the long years that still separated him from home.

* * * * *

Fatou-gaye understood in a vague way, that the moment of waking was fraught with danger, a critical instant when the white man was like to escape her altogether. So she used to keep on the watch, and when she saw Jean open his sad eyes and presently start up with disordered looks, she would run quick and be on her knees beside him to do his bidding, or throwing her little arms about his neck,

"What ails you, white man?" she would ask, in a voice as gentle and languorous as the notes of a *Griot's* guitar.

. . . But these moments of insight never lasted long. Once he was awake, his usual apathy resumed its sway,—and once more he began to see things under their accustomed aspect.

II

. . . It was a most important and highly complicated operation,—dressing Fatou's hair. It took place once a week and occupied the whole day.

First thing in the morning she used to set

off for Guet-n'dar, the negro town, where in a pointed hut of thatch and dry reeds, lived the hairdresser in highest repute with her clients, the Nubian dames. There she remained for hours together, squatted on the sand, surrendering herself absolutely into the hands of that patient and painstaking artist.

The woman began by undressing the elaborate coiffure,—unstringing the pearls one by one, unplaiting and disentangling the heavy coils of hair, then reconstructing the amazing edifice, into the construction of which entered coral, gold pieces, copper spangles, beads of green jade and beads of amber,—beads or rather balls of amber as big as apples, an heirloom from her mother, precious family ornaments smuggled into the land of slavery.

The most complicated to comb out however was the back of Fatou's pretty head and neck. There the thick woolly masses had to be sorted into hundreds of tiny corkscrew curls, stiff with gum and scrupulously arranged in order, like rows upon rows of black fringe.

Each of these corkscrews was wound separately round a long piece of straw and then smeared with a thick layer of gum; to give this time to dry, the straws had to remain in place till next morning. Fatou used to return with all these little straws sticking in her hair; for that night her head looked more like a porcupine than anything else.

But next day, when the straws were removed, what a fine effect!

On top of all a sort of blue, highly transparent gauze was thrown in the Khassonkee fashion, which enveloped the whole creation like a blue spider's web. This headdress, once properly set up, lasted night and day for a whole week without renewal.

Fatou-gaye's footgear consisted of elegant little leather sandals, fastened by straps passing between the big toe and the next,—like the *cothurni* or buskins of the Ancients.

She wore the scanty, tight-fitting waist-cloth, which the Egyptian women of the time of the Pharaohs bequeathed to Nubia. Over this she threw a *boubou*, a large square

of muslin with a hole to pass the head through, and falling like a *peplum* to below the knees.

Her ornaments included ponderous silver rings riveted round the wrists and ankles, and great collars of *soumaree*, Jean's means not allowing him to indulge in the extravagance of amber or gold necklaces.

These *soumarees* are plaits made of several rows of little brown berries strung together; those which ripen on the banks of the Gambia have a penetrating, poignant, peppery scent, a perfume *sui generis*, one of the most characteristic odours of the Senegal.

She was very pretty, was Fatou-gaye, with this towering barbaric headdress, that gave her something the look of a Hindoo divinity decked out for a religious festival. Not a trace of the flat, thick-lipped face of certain African races, which Europeans are in the habit of regarding as the generic type of negro physiognomy. She was of pure Khassonkee blood; the nose was small and finely cut, with small, delicate, very mobile

nostrils, the mouth well shaped and pretty, with beautiful teeth; above all, the eyes, the whites of which had a bluish tinge, were large and liquid, now full of a certain barbaric seriousness, now dancing with impish malice.

III

Fatou never did a stroke of work; it was a veritable Odalisque Jean had taken for his mistress.

She knew how to wash and mend her *boubous* and waist-cloths. She was always as clean as a black cat dressed in white,—by simple instinct to begin with, and besides, she quite understood Jean would not endure her otherwise. But beyond these cares of her person, she was incapable of any sort of work.

Now the poor old Peyrals could no longer send their boy the little savings they used to put aside coin by coin for him, now that "nothing prospered with them any more," as old Françoise wrote, and they had even been obliged to borrow from the Spahi's

modest purse, Fatou found it increasingly difficult to make the two ends meet.

Fortunately she was a little person of very simple tastes, whose material needs were very cheaply satisfied.

In all the lands of the Sudan woman lives under conditions of marked inferiority to man. Repeatedly in the course of her life she is bought and sold like a head of cattle, the price diminishing in inverse ratio to her plainness of face, her physical defects and her age.

One day Jean asked his friend Nyaor: "What have you done with Nokhoudounkhoulle, your wife,—the one who was so handsome?"

And Nyaor answered with a quiet smile: "Nokhoudounkhoulle was a chatterbox, and I have sold her: with the price they gave me, I have bought thirty sheep, that never say a word."

To the woman's lot falls the hardest work of the native household,—pounding millet for the *kousskouss*.

From dawn to evening, in all the length and breadth of Nubia, from Timbuctoo to the Guinea Coast, in every village of thatched huts, under the devouring sun, the negresses' wooden pestles are rising and falling with a deafening noise in the mortars of *caïlcedrà*. Thousands of braceleted arms are for ever plying this exhausting work, the weary workers chattering and quarrelling amongst themselves and adding to the monotonous thud-thud the sounds of their shrill ape-like voices. The result is a din every African traveller knows and which proclaims from afar the approach to every native village.

The product of this never-ending labour, which wears out generation after generation of women, is a coarse millet meal, with which they make a tasteless sort of pap, the *kousskouss*, the universal groundwork of negro diet.

Fatou-gaye escaped the legendary toil of the women of her race. Every evening, she used to go down to Coura-n'diaye's quarters,

the old poetess and discarded mistress of the king El-Hadj, the *Griot* woman. There, at the price of a small monthly payment, she enjoyed the right of sitting among the ex-favourite's little slave-girls round the great calabashes, in which the *kousskouss* smoked piping hot, and eating her fill, to the satisfaction of the healthy appetite of her sixteen years.

Aloft on her *tara*, reclining on fine, many-patterned mats, the dethroned king's favourite presided with impassive dignity.

And yet, what indescribable scenes these meals afforded of uproar and frolic,—the little black creatures, squatting on the ground in a circle round enormous calabashes, fishing for dear life to get their share of the Spartan fare, all their fingers in the bowl at once. There were shrieks and yells and grimaces and negro tricks and drolleries to drive a cage of monkeys to despair,—and unexpected incursions of great horned sheep,—and cats slily stretching their paws over the edge, then suddenly diving them into the steaming calabash,—

and invasions of yellow dogs, pushing their pointed noses into the bowl,—followed by screams of irresistibly comic laughter, displaying magnificent rows of white teeth in gums of the brightest peony red.

But Fatou was always dressed and her hands washed when Jean, who had to return to barracks at four o'clock, came back again after tattoo. Her face, under her towering idol-like headdress, wore a grave, almost melancholy expression; she was a different creature altogether.

It was dismal enough, this dead suburb, lying lonely on the outskirts of a dead city.

Jean often stood resting his elbows on the sill of the great window of his bare, white room, while the sea-breeze set the priests' parchments dancing, the talismans which Fatou had hung by long strings from the ceiling to guard their slumbers.

In front he had the far-stretching horizon of Senegal, the Point of Barbary, an immensity of level sand, over the far-away distances of which brooded dark mists of

twilight,—the deep-browed portal of the desert.

Or else he would sit at the door of Samba-Hamet's house, facing the square of waste ground bounded by old buildings of brick, tumble-down and in ruins,—in the middle of which grew the sickly yellow-leaved palm, of the thorny kind, that was the only tree of the district.

There he would sit and smoke cigarettes, which he had taught Fatou to roll for him. Alas! even this distraction he must think of foregoing before long,—for lack of money to buy tobacco.

His great brown eyes, grown dull and lifeless now, watched the antics of two or three little negro girls, who were chasing one another and playing mad gambols in the cool evening air, looking like moths in the twilight dusk.

In December, sunset almost invariably brought Saint-Louis a cooling breeze; great curtains of clouds would suddenly darken the sky, but without ever breaking into rain. They merely floated past at a great height

and disappeared. Still you could breathe these December evenings; it was a respite, this penetrating refreshing chill, and gave a sense of physical relief,—but at the same time a mysterious impression of heightened melancholy.

When Jean was seated thus at nightfall before the door of his lonely dwelling, his thoughts would wander far afield.

The same bird-like flight, which his eyes took every day across the great maps that hung on the walls of the Spahis' barracks, he often repeated mentally, especially of evenings, on an imaginary *mappa mundi* that his mind's eye had constructed of the surface of the globe.

First he would cross in fancy the great dark desert, that began there, just at the back of the house he lived in.

This first section of the journey was the portion his imagination traversed most leisurely,—tarrying in countless lonely and mysterious spots, where endless tracts of sand clogged his progress.

Then away across Algeria and the

Mediterranean, to arrive at last on the shores of France; then up the valley of the Rhône, coming eventually to the region which the map indicated by little black shadings, but which he pictured as blue mountain peaks high in the clouds, the Cévennes.

Mountains! ah, it was so long since his eye had grown accustomed only to the flatness of lonely deserts! so long since he had seen a hill, he had almost forgotten what such things were like.

And forests! the great chestnut woods of his own country, where moisture and shadow were, where real brooks of living water ran, where the ground was soil, not sand, carpeted with fresh mosses and tender grasses! . . . He felt he would have found comfort and relief in the mere sight of wet earth and moss, instead of these everlasting wastes of sand blown about by the wind of the desert.

And his beloved native village, that he always beheld in his imaginary travel first from above, as if sailing over it,—the old church which he pictured as white with snow,

the bell ringing the *Angelus* probably—it was seven in the evening, and his parents' cottage near by! All this looming blue and misty, in a cold December night, with a pale moon looking down over the countryside.

Could it be possible?—At this very instant, at the present hour, at the same time as with him, all this actually existed somewhere; it was not merely a memory, a vision of the past; at this very moment, there were people who were there,—and it was possible to go there!

* * * * *

What were they doing, his poor old father and mother, at this hour, when he was thinking of them? Seated in the chimney-corner no doubt before the wide hearth, where a fire of branches collected in the woods was crackling merrily.

He saw once more all the objects familiar to his childhood,—the little lamp of long winter evenings, the old bits of furniture, the cat asleep on a three-legged stool. And amidst all these friendly surroundings he

sought to picture the beloved occupants of the cottage.

Just on seven o'clock; yes, that was it, they were seated by the fireside,—aged no doubt,—his old father in his usual attitude, one hand supporting his fine grey head, the head of a mountaineer and an ex-cavalryman, and his mother, knitting most likely, the long needles slipping swiftly between her active and industrious fingers, or else holding up her distaff of hemp and spinning.

And Jeanne,—perhaps she was with them! His mother had told him in her letters how she used often to come and bear them company of winter evenings. What was she like? *Changed and better-looking than ever*, they had said. What was her face like, now that she was a tall grown-up girl? why, he had never seen her since she was a child.

* * * * *

Beside the handsome Spahi in his red jacket there was Fatou-gaye sitting installed, with her tall headdress of amber beads and copper spangles.

Night had fallen, and in the lonely square the little negro girls were still chasing one another, darting to and fro in the dusk, one quite naked, the two others with long flowing *boubous*, looking like two white bats. The cool wind excited them, stirring a wild desire to run and race and romp, just as the east wind at home, the dry wind that brings frost with it, sets the kittens gambolling.

IV

A learned Digression on Music and on a certain class of People called "Griots."

The art and practice of music in the Sudan is entrusted to a caste of specialists known as *Griots*, who from father to son are wandering minstrels and composers of heroic lays.

To these *Griots* falls the duty of beating the tom-toms at *bamboulas*, and chanting at festivities the praises of personages of rank. When a chief is bitten by the desire to hear his noble exploits extolled, he sends for the *Griots*, who come and sit on the sand ;

front of him and there and then improvise in his honour a long string of official couplets, accompanying their shrill voices with a guitar of very primitive construction, the cords of which are strung across snake-skins.

The *Griots* are the most philosophical and the laziest folk in the world; they live the life of vagabonds and never give a thought to the morrow. From village to village they go, either alone or in the train of great leaders of armies, receiving an alms here and an alms there, everywhere treated as pariahs, like the gipsies in Europe, sometimes loaded with gold and lavish favours, like courtesans in more civilized lands. In life they are debarred from the rites of religion, and after death from burial in consecrated ground.

They possess plaintive lyrics with vague, mystic words to them,—heroic chants, that are at once epics in their stately monotony and marching-songs in their marked and vigorous rhythm,—dance-tunes full of fire and frenzy,—love-songs that are very trans-

ports of amorous fancy, wild-beast howlings of hearts maddened with desire. But throughout this negro music the melody is all alike; as with all very primitive peoples, it consists of short mournful cadences, a series of notes more or less varied, starting from the highest tones possible to the human voice, then suddenly plunging to the deepest bass, then prolonged as a plaintive wail.

The Negroes sing constantly at their work, as well as during the drowsy half-sleep of the siesta. Amid the deep calm of noon, more exhausting in these lands than in the most sun-scorched plains of France, the singing of the Nubian women has its own peculiar charm, as it mingles with the never-ceasing hum of the grasshoppers. Yet it would be impossible to transport it outside the exotic frame of its surroundings, its natural elements of sun and sand; heard in another land, the strain would no longer be the same.

The more primitive the melody seems,—

the more vague and indefinite and monotonous, the more difficult and complicated the rhythm really is. The long wedding processions you meet at night, stepping slowly over the sand, sing chants in chorus, led by the *Griots*, that have a strange wild effect. The accompaniment runs on unbrokenly, while the air bristles with apparently wilful irregularities of rhythm and eccentricities of accord.

A very simple instrument, and one reserved exclusively for women, fulfils an important function in producing the general effect; this is merely a long gourd, open at one end. It is struck with the hand, now over the open end, now on the side, and gives two different sounds accordingly, one sharp and the other dull. This is all it is capable of, yet the result thus obtained is surprising. It is hard to describe the uncanny, almost diabolic, effect of a chorus of negro voices half drowned by the din of hundreds of instruments of this sort.

A running accompaniment going on unbrokenly all the while, and unexpected glides,

perfectly well understood and executed by all the performers, are the most characteristic features of this African music, inferior it may be to our own, but undoubtedly entirely different from it, music which our European organizations prevent us from adequately comprehending.

V

Bamboula

A passing *Griot* beats several times on his tom-tom. This is the rallying signal, and a crowd of Negroes gathers round him.

Women hurry up, and ranged in a close circle round the musician strike up one of the obscene songs they are so passionately fond of. One of them, the first that comes, separates from the crowd and darts into the midst, into the ring where the drum is sounding, and begins dancing with a rattle of *grigris* and glass beads; her steps, slow and restrained at first, are accompanied by appallingly licentious gestures; soon the pace quickens to a mad rapidity. A frantic

ape, a madwoman possessed by the devil, are the only words to describe her movements.

Presently she falls back, panting and exhausted, her black skin shining with pearls of sweat. Her companions welcome her with applause or hooting as the case may be; then another performer takes her place, and so on in succession till all have had their turn.

The old women are only distinguished by a more cynical and outrageous indecency. The child they often carry on their backs is jolted horribly and utters piercing screams; but in wild abandonment the negro women have lost even the maternal instinct, and nothing will stop them now.

In all the countries of Senegal, the times of rising of the full moon are moments particularly consecrated to the *bamboula*, evenings of high negro festivity. The moon seems to rise in this wide land of sand, in the hot immensity of these boundless horizons, redder and enormously bigger than elsewhere.

At the fall of the day the groups begin to form. The women for such occasions don waist-cloths of brilliant colours, and bedeck themselves with jewellery of fine gold of Galam. Their arms are loaded with heavy silver rings, their necks with an astounding profusion of *grigris*, glass beads, amber and coral gewgaws.

Then, as the red disk of the full moon appears, always magnified and deformed by the mirage, throwing great ruddy gleams athwart the horizon, a furious din rises from all the crowd; the fun is beginning.

At certain periods of the year, the deserted square before the house of Samba-Hamet became the scene of fantastic *bamboulas*.

On such occasions Coura-n'diaye would lend Fatou some of her precious ornaments to wear at the festivity.

Sometimes she would put in an appearance herself, as in the old days.

Then would rise a loud hum of admiration, as the old *Griot* woman stepped for-

ward, covered with gold, her head held high, a strange light rekindled in her dulled eyes. The upper part of her body was left insolently naked; on her black bosom, wrinkled as a mummy's, with breasts that lay huge and flaccid like two great empty bags of leather, were displayed wondrous gifts from El-Hadj, the Conqueror,—jade necklaces of tender, pale water-green, and rows upon rows of great balls of fine gold, of rare and inimitable workmanship. Her arms were one mass of gold, she had gold anklets, rings of gold on every toe, and an antique gold tiara on her head.

She looked like some ancient heathen idol decked out in state. Presently she would begin to sing; little by little the old excitement took her, and she waved her arms, that could hardly lift the weight of the bracelets that encircled them. Her voice, hoarse and cavernous at first, seemed to come from the depths of an empty carcass, but anon grew resonant and terrifying. It seemed an echo from beyond the tomb of the tones of the poetess of El-Hadj; in her great staring

eyes, shining with an infernal light, far-away reflections seemed to pass of the great, mysterious wars of the interior and great days of bygone triumph,—the armies of El-Hadj speeding across the desert, mighty slaughters that left whole tribes a prey to the vultures, the assault of Segou-Koro, all the villages of the Massina over hundreds of leagues of country from Medine to Timbuctoo, burning in the sunshine like forest fires.

* * * * *

Coura-n'diaye was worn out by the time she had done her songs, and came home again, trembling and quivering, to stretch herself on her *tara*. When her slave-girls had taken off her jewels and shampooed her body gently with their hands to make her sleep, they would leave her lying as still as a dead woman, to remain so for two whole days.

VI

Guet-n'dar, the negro village, built of grey straw on the yellow sand,—thousands and thousands of little round huts, half hidden behind palisades of dry reeds and each crowned with a great cap of thatch,—thousands and thousands of these conical roofs, affecting the most extravagant, the most acutely pointed shapes. While some look up straight and proud at the sky, others are all askew, looking at their next-door neighbours, others again, dilapidated and tumble-down, as if exhausted with having stood so long parching in the sun, seem on the point of shrivelling up and coiling back on themselves like an elephant's trunk. All this as far as the eye can reach, a never-ending perspective of jagged horns against the monotony of the blue sky.

Traversing this native town and dividing it in two, runs a broad alley of sand from north to south, straight and regular and opening at its extremity wide on the open desert. Environs and horizon are alike

desert, the desert is the background of everything at Guet-n'dar.

Either side of this great thoroughfare cutting athwart the mass of huts is a labyrinth of narrow tortuous lanes, turning and twisting like a maze. It is to these quarters of the town Fatou is taking Jean, holding one finger, negro fashion, clasped in her sturdy little black hand adorned with copper rings.

It is in January, seven in the morning, and the sun is barely up. It is an hour of pleasant freshness, even in Senegal.

Jean strides along with his proud, serious mien,—smiling to himself the while at the notion of the quaint errand Fatou-gaye is taking him on and the personage he is going to see. He goes with a good enough grace; the little journey interests and amuses him.

The fine day, the pure morning air, the physical relief of the unaccustomed coolness, all tend to soothe his spirit. Then for the moment Fatou-gaye looks really very pretty, and he feels all but in love with the child.

It is one of those strange passing moments, when memory is dead within him, when this land of Africa seems to wear a smile, and the Spahi surrenders himself without a second thought of gloom to the life that for three years has cradled his senses and rocked them asleep in a heavy ill-omened slumber, haunted by evil dreams.

The morning air is fresh and pure. Behind the grey palisades of reeds, that border the narrow streets of Guet-n'dar, are heard the first sounding thuds of the *kouss-kouss* beaters, mingled with shrill negro cries of awaking sleepers and the tinkle and rattle of glass beads. At every street corner stand skulls of horned sheep (those familiar with negro customs know these are the sacrifices of the *tabaski*) stuck on the end of long sticks, watching the passers-by with a look as if craning their wooden necks to see better. Everywhere are big lizards, *fetish* these too, swaying perpetually from side to side with the curious nervous contractions lizards have, the body sky-blue, the head a fine yellow like the skin of an orange. The

air reeks with the smell of black humanity, leather amulets, *kousskouss* and *soumaree.*

Little negro lads begin to appear at the hut doors, a row of blue pearls strung about their big bellies and hanging navels, grinning from ear to ear, with pear-shaped heads close-shaven all but three tiny pigtails. After stretching themselves, one and all cast great staring eyes of wonder at Jean, some of the bolder spirits going so far as to cry :—

"Toubah! toubah! . . . good-day, toubah!"

* * * * *

All this smacks strong of the land of exile and far-off banishment; the smallest details are strange and unfamiliar. But such magic is there in these tropical sunrises, such a delicious clearness of the air this morning, such a pleasant relief in the unaccustomed coolness, that Jean throws back a merry word to the black babies' greeting, smiles at Fatou's remarks, yields to the charm of the moment and forgets. . . .

The personage, to whose abode Jean and Fatou were bound, was a tall old Negro,

with a cunning, crafty eye, by name Samba-Latir.

When both were seated on the floor on mats inside their host's hut, Fatou began to speak and unfolded her case, which we shall see was a serious and critical one.

For several days she had been in the habit of meeting at the same hour a certain old woman, a very ugly old woman, who always looked at her in a strange way,—out of the corner of her eye without turning her head! . . . Finally, yesterday evening, the girl had come home in tears, declaring to Jean she knew she was bewitched.

All night long she had been obliged to keep her head in the water to mitigate the immediate effects of the spell.

The collection of amulets she was provided with included charms against every sort of calamity and accident,—against bad dreams and poisonous plants, against dangerous tumbles and snake-bites, against infidelities on her lover's part and the ravages of white ants, against the stomach-ache and the crocodile! But there was none as yet

against the evil eye and the spells people put on you as you pass them in the street.

Now Samba-Latir was a well-known specialist in fighting these dangers; that is why Fatou-gaye had come to him.

Yes, Samba-Latir had the remedy all ready made. He drew out from an old mysterious chest a little red bag attached to a leather lace; this he put round Fatou-gaye's neck, muttering the proper sacramental words,—and the evil spirit was exorcised.

It only cost two *khâliss* of silver,—ten francs, which the Spahi, who could never bargain, not even for an amulet, paid without a murmur. Yet he felt the blood mount to his temples as he saw the two coins disappear. He did not care inordinately for money (he had never been able to get himself to realize its value), but still, two *khâliss*, it was a heavy drain for the time being on the Spahi's slender purse. Above all, he could not help telling himself, with a remorseful tightening at his heart, that his old parents were no doubt going without

many things that cost less money than two *khâliss*,—and were most certainly more useful than Fatou's amulets.

VII

Letter from Jeanne Méry to her cousin Jean.

"My dear Jean,

"Here are pretty well three years gone since you left home and I am still waiting for you to say something about coming back. I have full faith in you, mind you, and I know you are not the kind to deceive me; but that does not hinder the time dragging; there are times, of nights, when I feel so sad, and all sorts of ideas fill my head. Besides, my parents say, if you had really wanted, you could have got furlough to pay a visit to our parts. I know of course there are folks in the village who set them on; but it is true all the same, that cousin Pierre came back home twice, he did, while he was serving.

"There are people who put it about, that I am going to marry big Suirot. Just think! what a funny idea to marry that great booby,

who plays the gentleman; I just let them talk, because I know there is nobody in the world for me like my dear Jean. You may be quite easy, there is no fear of their getting me to go to the dance; I don't care if they do say I am giving myself airs. Dance with that fat noodle of a Toinou, or others like him, no indeed! What I do is to sit quiet of evenings on the bench at Rose's before the door; there I think and think and think of my dear Jean, who is worth all the rest put together, and you may be sure I want no better amusement when I think of him.

"Thank you for your portrait; it is you exactly, though they do say here you are greatly changed; *I* think it is just the same face as ever,—except that you don't look out at the world quite in the same way. I have put it above the great chimney-piece and all round it my Easter palm-branch, so that, the moment I come into the room, it is the first thing that meets my eyes.

"My dear Jean, I have not dared yet to wear the beautiful bracelet made by the Negroes, that you sent me,—for fear of Olivette and Rose. They think I am too

much of the *young lady* now; it would be much worse then. When you are there and we are married, it will be different; then I shall wear Aunt Tounelle's lovely gold link-chain and her châtelaine. Only come; mind, I do suffer for want of a sight of you; I seem to be merry enough sometimes with the others, but afterwards I feel so miserable, oh! so miserable, I run away into a corner and cry.

"Good-bye, dear Jean; I send you a kiss from the bottom of my heart.

"Your loving

"JEANNE MÉRY."

VIII

Fatou's hands, which were a fine black on the backs, were pink inside. This had long frightened the Spahi; he did not like to look at the palms of Fatou's hands, which, in spite of himself, gave him a horrid cold feeling, as if they were monkey's paws.

Yet the girl's hands were small and delicate, and attached to the rounded arm by a very slender wrist. But the discoloration of

the palms, the fingers half one colour half another, had something not-human about it, that startled and shocked him.

This and certain strange falsetto intonations, that occasionally escaped her, when she was excited, this and certain attitudes, certain dubious gestures, all this recalled mysterious resemblances that troubled the imagination. . . .

In course of time however Jean had got used to these little things and thought no more about them. At times, when Fatou struck him as looking pretty, he felt he loved her still, he would even laughingly call her by an odd Yolof nickname, that meant *little monkey girl.*

Fatou was always deeply mortified at this title of endearment, and would then assume a dignified look of seriousness that diverted the Spahi vastly.

One day,—it was exceptionally fine, a day of almost agreeable temperature with a sky of crystal,—one day Fritz Muller, who was coming to see Jean, stepped softly upstairs and then halted suddenly on the

threshold, whence he looked in with huge amusement at the following scene.

Jean, wearing the happy smile of a child amusing itself, appeared to be examining Fatou with the utmost care, stretching out her arms, turning her round, inspecting her this way and that, without saying a syllable—then suddenly with an air of conviction, he voiced his conclusions in the words :—

"*You just the same thing as monkey ! . . .*"

To which Fatou, much hurt :—

"*Ah ! Tjean ! you not ought say that, white man ! You know, monkey he not know how talk,—and me, me know velly well !*"

At this Fritz Muller went off into a great shout of laughter,—Jean following suit, especially when he saw the dignified and intensely proper air Fatou insisted on assuming by way of protest against such an insulting conclusion.

"Very pretty little monkey, anyway!" said Muller, who admired Fatou very much. He had lived for years in Africa and was quite a connoisseur in Sudanese beauty.

"Very pretty little monkey!" If all those in the woods of Galam were like that, a man might even yet come to live content in this cursed land, that has surely never seen the light of God's countenance!

IX

A great white room, open to the night wind, two hanging lamps, which great moths kept flying in and beating wildly with their wings, a table brilliant with men in red about it, and slatternly black serving-wenches hanging around,—a grand supper in fact in the Spahis' barracks.

It has been a military fête day at Saint-Louis,—review of the troops, then horse races, camel races, oxen races—mounted oxen, canoe races. The usual programme of high days and holidays in a small provincial town, with an exotic note thrown in from the wilds of Nubia.

In the streets every able-bodied man of arms, whether man-of-war's man, Spahi or rifleman, has been parading in full-dress

uniform; mulattoes too of both sexes in holiday dress,—old *signardes* of Senegal (half-castes of rank), stiff and staid with their tall headdresses of spotted India silk and their two little corkscrew curls in the fashion of 1820, and young *signardes*, in modern finery,—drab, faded faces, characteristic of the Coast of Africa. The two or three white women in bright, fresh toilettes, and behind them, as a startling set-off, the crowd of Negroes covered with *grigris* and savage ornaments—all Guet-n'dar was there in its gala attire.

Whatever Saint-Louis can supply of animation and life, whatever the old Colony can bring into its dead street, is out and about for a day's festivity—to return to-morrow into the sleepy dullness of its silent houses, wrapped in their monotonous winding-sheet of whitewash.

The Spahis, who have been parading all day long by officers' orders on the Place du Gouvernement, are all agog with the excitement of so much unusual movement. To-

night they are to celebrate the arrival of promotion lists and medals by the last mail from France; and Jean, who as a rule keeps mainly to himself, joins his comrades at this regimental supper.

They have been busy enough, the black serving-wenches, attending to the Spahis' wants,—not that the men have eaten a great deal, but they have drunk frightfully, and are tipsy to a man.

A number of toasts have been honoured, and a number of *sentiments* proposed, extravagant in the outspoken cynicism of their wording; soldiers' wit, coarse and unconventional, at once intensely sceptical and intensely boyish. Many extraordinary songs, appallingly improper, collected who knows where from,—Algeria, India, all the world,—have been sung, some as solos given with comic gravity, others bellowed in stentorian chorus to the accompaniment of shivering glasses and banging fists. Old jokes, old, stale, simple-minded jokes, have been fired off, to be answered by merry peals of boyish laughter, and words

uttered fit to bring a blush to the Devil's own face.

Then suddenly a Spahi, amid all this riot of uproarious folly, lifts a glass of champagne and proposes an utterly unexpected toast :—

"To those who fell at Mecké and Bobdiarah!"

The effect of such a toast,—the author of the present story has not invented the incident,—was strange, startling to a degree! . . . Was it a tribute of remembrance to the dead, or an impious jest? . . . He was very drunk, the Spahi who proposed the ill-sounding toast, and his rolling eye was dark and mournful.

* * * * *

Alas! . . . in a few years who will remember aught of the men who fell in the rout at Bobdiarah and Mecké, and whose bones are bleached by now where they strew the desert sand?

The people of Saint-Louis, it may be, who saw them set forth, can recall their

names; but in a few years' time who will remember and can repeat them still? . . .

* * * * *

So glasses were drained to the memory of *those who fell at Mecké and Bobdiarah.*— But the unexpected toast had produced a momentary silence of astonishment, and cast, as it were, a veil of black crêpe over the Spahis' merrymaking.

Jean particularly, whose eyes had brightened under the influence of the general hilarity and who to-night for once was laughing freely and heartily, Jean grew pensive and grave once more, without quite knowing why. . . . *Died away yonder in the desert!* . . . The picture the words called up froze his marrow, like the sound of a jackal's howling, and sent a shudder coursing through his flesh. . . .

A child still, poor Jean,—not hardened yet, not a fighting man yet!—Yet he was brave enough, he was not afraid, not a bit afraid of going into battle. When they talked of Boubakar-Segou, who was prowl-

ing in those days with his army almost at the very gates of Saint-Louis, in the Cayor, he felt his heart bound; he dreamed about it sometimes, he thought it would do him good and wake him up to go under fire at last, even against a negro king; at times he was dying to go. . . .

Surely it was to fight, that he had joined the Spahis,—and not to dally, languid and lifeless, in a little white house, under the spells of a Khassonkee girl!

* * * * *

Poor lads, who pledge the memory of the dead, laugh, sing, be as gay and reckless as you will, enjoy the merry moment as it flies! . . . But somehow the songs and the uproar ring false in this land of Senegal; away in the lonely desert yonder must be places even now marked out for some of you.

X

"In Galam!"—Who can tell all the mysterious echoes the words are capable of

awakening in the depths of an exiled negro soul!

The first time Jean had asked Fatou—it was a long time ago now, when she was still a denizen of his mistress's house :—

"Where are you from, child?" Fatou had answered with a shaking voice :—

"From the land of Galam. . . ."

Poor Negroes of the Sudan, exiles driven from their native village by one of the great wars or famines or devastations these primitive countries are subject to! Sold, haled into slavery,—sometimes they have traversed on foot, under the lash of the slave-master, stretches of country wider than the whole length of Europe. Yet deep in their black hearts the image of their country is still engraved, vivid and ineffaceable.

Now it is far-off Timbuctoo, or Segou-Koro, reflecting its great palaces of white earth in the Niger, or perhaps only some poor little village of straw huts, lost in the lonely desert or hidden away in an unknown valley of the mountains of the South,—which the passage of the conquering army

has turned into a heap of cinders and a charnel-house for the vultures. . . .

"In Galam!" . . . the words are spoken softly with a fond and pensive accent.

"In Galam!" . . . Fatou used to say, "*Tjean, one day I will take you with me there, to live in Galam!* . . ."

The ancient, sacred land of Galam, which Fatou could see at any moment by closing her eyes,—land of Galam, home of gold and ivory, where in the sun-warmed waters sleep the grey caymans under the high mangroves, where the elephant, scouring the forest depths, beats the soil ponderously with his flying feet!

At one time Jean had dreamt of this land of Galam. Fatou had told him extraordinary tales of its wonders, which had stirred his imagination, still open to the fascination of whatever was new and strange. Now this was all over, his curiosity about the whole continent of Africa was deadened and exhausted; he preferred to go on with his monotonous life at Saint-Louis, and be there on the spot ready for the happy moment

when he should go back to his beloved Cévennes.

And then—to bury himself in Fatou's far-off country,—so remote from the sea, which is always a *something cool*, from which blow refreshing breezes, which, above all, is the path of communication with the rest of the world, to depart to this distant land of Galam, where the air must be still hotter and heavier, to plunge into the stifling mazes of the interior! No, he would never think of it again, he would have refused now, if he had been invited to visit the marvels of Galam. What filled his dreams was his own native land, with its mountains and cool limpid streams. Only to think of Fatou's country made him hotter and set his head aching.

XI

Fatou could not set eyes on a *n'gabou* (hippopotamus) without running the risk of falling dead on the spot; it was an old negro spell cast on her family by a wizard of the Galam country. Every means had been

tried to conjure it away, but in vain; there were many instances among her ancestors of individuals who had fallen down dead in this way, at the mere sight of the huge beasts, for the spell had mercilessly pursued the stock for several generations.

Indeed this is a form of spell by no means uncommon in the Sudan. Certain families cannot look upon the lion; others the manatee, others—these last the most ill-starred of all,—the cayman. The affliction is the more terrible as amulets are of no avail against it.

The precautions may be imagined, which Fatou's ancestors were forced to take in the Galam country,—never to be in the open at the hours favoured by the *n'gabous*, above all never to go near the great grassy marshes, where these animals love to disport themselves.

In Fatou's own case, having heard that in a certain house at Saint-Louis a young tame hippopotamus was kept, she invariably went an immense distance out of her way to avoid passing anywhere in its neighbourhood, for

fear of yielding to the dreadful itch of curiosity that tormented her to go and look in the face of the beast, of which she made her girl-friends give her minute descriptions every day. This morbid curiosity, it may readily be guessed, was itself connected with the same sorceries and evil enchantments.

XII

The days dragged by in the monotony of stifling heat; each was like the other,—same regular duties at the Spahi barracks, same sun blazing down on its white walls, same silence brooding over all the place. Rumours of war against Boubakar-Segou, son of El-Hadj, supplied a subject of talk to the red-jackets, but nothing came of it all. Nothing ever happened in the moribund settlement, and what news there was from Europe, arrived in faint feeble echoes, as though stifled by the heat.

Jean went through divers moral phases, he had his ups and downs. As a rule, he felt nothing now but a vague sense of weari-

ness, a sick distaste for everything; then came times when the homesickness, that seemed to have fallen asleep in his heart, would return to set it aching.

The winter season was approaching; the heavy breakers on the beach had subsided, and already there were some of those days when air seemed lacking for the lungs to breathe; the warm sea was smooth and oily, reflecting in its immense mirror the powerful light that beat unmercifully down from the torrid sky. . . .

* * * * *

Did Jean love Fatou-gaye?

Well, he scarcely knew himself, poor fellow. The fact is, he looked upon her as an inferior being, about on the level of his yellow *laobe* dog; he was not likely to take the trouble to unravel what there was at bottom of that little black soul,—black as the Khassonkee envelope that contained it.

She was full of deceitfulness and lies, was this little Fatou, with an incredibly large dose of malice and spiteful mischief; Jean

had known that much for many a day. But he was equally conscious of the utter devotion she had for him, a dog's devotion for its master, a Negro's adoration for his *fetish*,— and without knowing precisely what heights of heroism the sentiment was capable of rising to, he was touched and softened by it.

True his pride would awake sometimes, his dignity as a white man rise in revolt. His troth plighted to his fiancée and betrayed for the sake of a little black girl, this too troubled his conscience as an honourable man ; he felt ashamed of being so weak.

But she had ripened into a perfection of beauty, this little Fatou-gaye. When she walked, supple and upright, with the graceful sway of the hips which the African women seem to have borrowed from the felines of their land, when she passed, a flowing drapery of white muslin cast like a *peplum* about her bosom and rounded shoulders, she was as perfect as an Antique statue ; when she lay asleep, her arms thrown above her head, she had the gracious curves of a Grecian urn. Beneath her high amber-

beaded headdress, her finely-cut, regular features would at times assume something of the mysterious beauty of an idol of polished ebony; her great eyes, sparkling like blue porcelain from under the half-drooped lids, her smile slowly broadening and showing the white teeth in her black face, all this had a negro grace, a sensual charm, a force of physical seduction, a something indescribable, recalling at once the ape, the maiden and the tigress, that sent a fierce, unfamiliar fire of intoxication coursing along the Spahi's veins.

Jean felt a sort of superstitious horror of all these amulets; there were moments when all this profusion of *grigris* annoyed him and came to weigh on his spirits at last. He did not believe in it all of course; but to see them all about him, these negro amulets, to know that nearly every one of them was supposed to have some special virtue towards keeping him bound in chains of subjection, to see the things hanging from his ceiling and fastened to his walls, to find

them hidden under his mats and his *tara*, to discover them lurking in every hole and corner, little old hideous *fetishes*, with ugly looks and strange weird shapes, to feel the horrid things slipped stealthily on to his chest, when he woke in the morning,—all this ended by giving him a hateful feeling, as if invisible bonds of darkness and devilment were being woven about him in the air.

Then money was very short too. Yes, he told himself, he would certainly send Fatou about her business.

He would use these two last years in winning his stripes at last; he would send his old parents a little sum of money every month to make life a trifle easier to them. This would not prevent his saving something to spend on a wedding present for Jeanne Méry and contributing a suitable share himself to their marriage festivities.

But,—was it the influence of the amulets, or the force of habit, or a sluggishness of will that came of the heat and heaviness of the atmosphere?—Fatou still held him

captive under her little hand,—and he made no move to be rid of her.

His thoughts often dwelt on his fiancée; to lose her would have broken up his life altogether. A sort of aureole surrounded the mental image of the *tall, handsome girl* his mother spoke of, who *grew better-looking every day*, so the letters said. He tried to picture to himself her face as a woman by developing in his fancy the features of the child of fifteen he had left behind. All his plans for future happiness centred on her. But it was as a something very precious which was his for the asking that he had come to regard her, something in a far land, sitting waiting for him at the fireside. Her image had grown somewhat faint,—to look back upon and to look forward to; there were times when it had a way of vanishing from his mind altogether.

And his old father and mother, he loved them too. For his father he felt a deep filial affection, an almost religious veneration. But perhaps the most tender spot of all in his heart was after all reserved for his mother.

Take sailors, soldiers, Spahis, all the young fellows that are torn from their homes to expend their lives in far-off countries or on the high seas, amid conditions of existence the roughest and most unnatural,—take the worst and most reckless of them all, the most heedless and dissipated and daredevil,—look deep into the hearts of them, and there, in the furthest, most sacred recess, you will find an old mother sitting enthroned,—an old peasant-woman very likely from some province,—a Basque woman in her woollen hood, or a Breton in her white coif.

* * * * *

XIII

For the fourth time the winter season has come round.

Still, stifling days, without a breath of air. The sky, dull and leaden looking, is reflected in a sea as smooth as oil, where whole shoals of sharks play. All the length of the endless African coast the monotonous line of the sands sparkles dazzlingly white under the fierce reverberation of the sun.

It is the season when the fish are most voracious. Of a sudden the smooth, polished surface of the sea is violently disturbed over a space of hundreds of yards, and splashes and flashes in tossing spray. It is an enormous mass of fugitive fish dashing along at headlong speed just below the surface, beating their million fins in frantic haste to escape the pursuit of a shoal of sharks.

It is the favourite time too chosen by the negro boatmen for long journeys and contests of speed.

At times when the heavy air seems positively unbreathable by European lungs, when life seems unendurable and movement a sheer impossibility,—at such times, if you are dozing on the deck of some river craft, under the shelter of a moistened awning, often in the middle of your broken sleep, you will be startled by the shouts and panting cries of oarsmen and the rush of water churned up by the furious beat of paddles. It is a canoe race flying past, the black rowers straining every muscle under the blazing sun.

The negro population has turned out to see

the sight; there they stand thronging the banks in an excited crowd. The spectators egg on the competitors with a tremendous din; here, just as at home, the victors are greeted with applause and clapping of hands, the vanquished with howls of derision.

XIV

Jean only put in at the Spahis' barracks the amount of time strictly necessary for the performance of his military duties,—and even these his comrades often did for him. His officers shut their eyes to these little accommodations, which enabled him to spend nearly all his days at his home quarters.

By this time everyone had come to be fond of him; the look of intelligence and straightforwardness that beamed from his eye, the charm of his handsome face and pleasant voice and cordial bearing, had gradually brought all he came in contact with under the unconscious spell of his influence. Jean had ended, in spite of everything, in winning universal confidence and good-will;

he had made for himself a place apart, which gave him a status of almost complete freedom and independence. He had learned the secret of being at one and the same time a punctual trooper, and next door to a free agent.

XV

One evening he went back to barracks for tattoo. For once the great building was all alive. The barrack-yard was full of groups talking in loud and excited tones; Spahis were rushing up and down the stairways four steps at a time, as if under the influence of uncontrollable delight. Evidently there was news,—and good news, afoot.

"Great news for you, Peyral!" Fritz Muller from Alsace shouted, as he came up; "you have marching orders for to-morrow, marching orders for Algeria,—lucky dog that you are!"

A dozen recruits had arrived from France by the boat from Dakar; a dozen of the longest service men,—Jean amongst the number,—were to be drafted, as a special

mark of favour, to finish their time in Algeria.

They were to start next day for Dakar. At Dakar they would take the French packet, bound for Bordeaux; thence they would travel to Marseilles by the Southern Railway lines,—with stoppages *en route*, allowing a flying visit home,—for those who *had* a hearth and home, then on to Marseilles to catch the steamer for Algiers,—a paradise in the eyes of every Spahi; and the brief remaining period with the colours would slip by like a dream!

XVI

Jean went back home, following the dismal banks of the river. It was a hot, heavy night, a night of stars shining down with a wondrous calm and luminous transparency on the Senegal country. The only sounds were the light ripple of the current, and deadened by distance, the *anamalis fobil* of springtime, which he was listening to for the fourth time now at this same spot, and

which was associated with his first demoralising acts of sensual indulgence in this negro land. Now, it seemed, the same wild cry was to greet his departure. . . .

The slender crescent of the moon, the great stars sparkling in a luminous haze, low down on the level horizon the fires burning on the farther bank of the stream, in the negro village of Sorr,—each and all were reflected in long wavering lines of light on the surface of the steaming water. The heat seemed to pervade everything,—the stagnant air and the phosphorescent water. A mysterious calm, a nerveless melancholy brooded over the deserted river banks.

Yes, it was quite true, the unexpected news! He had made due inquiries, and found all correct. His name was on the roster of those to go; by this time to-morrow he would be sailing down the river, never to come back again. . . .

For to-night there was nothing to be done; in barracks the offices were closed, and everybody abroad. All preparations must be held over for to-morrow; nothing

left for to-night but to think, to gather one's ideas together, to indulge all sorts of dreams, to bid good-bye to all things in the land of exile.

His head buzzed with a crowd of disconnected thoughts and incoherent notions. In a month from now perhaps, to make a hurried appearance in his village, to give a passing greeting to his dear old parents, to see Jeanne changed into a tall, grown-up girl, to behold all this at a run, as it were in a dream! . . . This was the dominant impression that beset him every other minute, giving his heart a great shock each time, that set it beating furiously. . . .

But he was not prepared for seeing them all; there were all kinds of painful reflections came and mingled with this great piece of unexpected good luck.

What sort of a figure would he cut, appearing at the end of three years, without so much as the modest sergeant's stripes to show, without bringing back a single present for anybody from foreign parts, as poor as Job, without one penny to rub against

another! Why, he would not have time so much as to provide himself with a new rig-out, fit to walk up the village street in.

It was too hasty altogether, marching off like this at a moment's notice. It was exciting, intoxicating,—but they might surely have given him a day or two to turn round in!

Then Algeria, he did not know the country, it meant nothing to him. Was he to go through all the trouble and trials of a second acclimatization! After all, if he was bound to finish out these years filched from his proper life and which he was condemned to spend far away from home, best get them over here where he was, beside the great dismal waters he knew so well, in the land whose melancholy aspect was at any rate familiar.

Alas! he loved the land of his exile, poor wretch; yes, he knew now, he was bound to it by a host of intimate and mysterious ties. He was half mad with joy at the thought of going home; yet he felt it impossible to part from these plains of sand, from the house of Samba-Hamet. The very melancholy of it all, the very misery of scorching heat and

blinding light, made an irresistible appeal upon his heart.

He was not ready, he could not leave it all behind at such short notice.

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The subtle influence of all his surroundings has little by little impregnated the very blood in his veins. He feels himself tied and bound by a thousand invisible threads and dark fetters and black amulets.

His head is filled with a whirl of confused and contradictory thoughts; the unexpected deliverance frightens him. In the exhausting heat of the stifling night, which seems teeming with emanations of storm and tempest, strange, mysterious influences are contending round his bed, the powers of sleep and death striving against those of light and life. . . .

* * * * *

XVII

Sharp and quick these military departures! By evening of the next day, his belongings

hastily packed, his papers duly signed and sealed, Jean stands leaning on the bulwarks of a vessel making her way down stream. As he smokes his cigarette, he watches Saint-Louis growing fainter in the distance.

Fatou-gaye is squatted beside him on the deck. With all her waist-cloths and all her *grigris* stuffed hurriedly into four great calabashes, she was ready at the appointed hour. Jean has had to pay her passage as far as Dakar with the last *khâliss* of his pay. He never grudged it, ready enough to satisfy this last caprice, and not sorry to keep her a little while longer with him. The tears she shed, the *widow's laments* she uttered according to her country's custom, all this was perfectly sincere and very touching. Jean was stirred to the bottom of his heart by her despair, and he forgot entirely for the moment how naughty her ways, and false her tongue, and black her skin, were.

The softer his heart grows at the thought of home, the more pity, and even something of tenderness, he feels for poor Fatou. At

any rate he will take her as far as Dakar; it is always a little longer time gained to think over what he can do with her.

XVIII

Dakar, a sort of colonial seaport hastily built on a foundation of sand and red rocks, an improvised point of call for the steam-packets at the westernmost point of Africa known as Cape Verde. Great *baobabs*, planted here and there on desolate sand-dunes, vast clouds of fish-eagles and vultures hovering over the plain, such are the most conspicuous features of the spot.

Fatou-gaye is there, installed provisionally in the hut of a mulatto family. She has vowed she never wanted to see Saint-Louis again,—and there her projects end! She has no notion what is to become of her,—nor has Jean. Search as he may, he has found nothing, thought of nothing for her, —and he has no money left! . . .

The fatal morning has come; the packet in which the Spahis are to embark will sail

in a few hours. Fatou-gaye is there, squatted beside her poor calabashes, that hold all her earthly possessions. She says never a word, does not even answer now when asked a question; her eyes stare in a fixed gaze of miserable, stupid, animal despair,—yet a despair so deep and genuine it breaks the heart to look at.

Jean stands beside her, twisting his moustaches, without a notion what is to be done.

Suddenly the door bursts open with a crash, and a tall trooper dashes in like a whirlwind, under the influence of strong emotion, his eyes sparkling and his whole look eager and agitated.

It is Pierre Boyer, who for two years has been Jean's comrade and room-mate. True, they scarcely ever exchanged a syllable,—each was so much shut up in himself,—but they respected one another, and when Boyer went to serve at Goree, they wrung each other's hands in a cordial grip.

Snatching off his cap, Pierre Boyer mutters a hurried excuse for rushing in like

a madman; then he seizes Jean's hands with an appealing gesture.

"Oh! Peyral," he cries, "I have been hunting for you since before daylight. . . . Listen to me, let us have a moment's talk; I have a great favour to ask you.

"First hear what I have to say, and don't hurry yourself to answer right away. . . .

"You are off to Algeria, . . . I start to-morrow, worse luck! for the outpost of Gadiangue, in the Ouankarah,—with some other details from Goree. There is fighting going on yonder. Three months of it perhaps,—and promotion to win no doubt, or a medal to be got.

"We have the same period still to serve, you and I; we are of an age. It would not alter the date of your discharge home. . . . Peyral, will you exchange with me? . . . "

Jean had understood in a moment, guessed what the other wanted, at the first word. His eyes opened with a troubled look, as if dilated by the agony of uncertainty within. A tumultuous flood of projects and indecisions and contradictions was already rising to his

brain. He stood in deep thought, his arms folded and his gaze fixed on the ground, while Fatou, who understood what was afoot quite well, had sprung up panting with excitement, waiting the sentence of doom that was to fall from Jean's lips.

Then the other Spahi began again, speaking quick and fast, as if anxious not to give Jean time to pronounce the fatal *no* he dreaded to hear.

"Listen here, Peyral, you would be doing a good stroke of business, I do assure you."

"The others, Boyer? . . . Have you asked any of the others? . . ."

"Yes, and they have refused. But I knew they would; they have their reasons, reasons of their own. You will be doing a good stroke of business, I tell you, Peyral. The Governor of Goree takes an interest in me; and he promises you his protection, if you agree. We thought of you in the first instance" (he glanced at Fatou as he spoke) "because you like this country, everybody knows that. . . . When you come back from Gadiangue, they would send you to finish

your service at Saint-Louis, that is settled with the Governor; things would be arranged so, I give you my oath."

". . . But we should never have the time, anyhow," interrupted Jean, whose wits felt all astray, and who found a relief in getting hold of an insuperable difficulty to appeal to.

"Not a bit of it," cried Pierre Boyer, a spark of hope already flashing in his eye. "We have time, Peyral, time enough,—all the afternoon before us. You need trouble your head about nothing. Everything is arranged with the Governor; all the papers are ready. Only your consent and your signature to it,—and I am off to Goree; come back in a couple of hours, and the thing's done! Listen here, Peyral; here are my savings, three hundred francs, they are yours. It will help you perhaps, when you get back to Saint-Louis, to settle down; it will be some use anyway, do what you like with it."

"Oh! . . . thank you! . . ." Jean replied; "I'm not the man to take payment, not I! . . ."

He turned his head away proudly,—and Boyer, who saw he had struck the wrong note, took his hand, saying: "Now don't be angry, Peyral!" He kept Jean's hand in his, and the two men stood there, facing each other, each consumed with anxiety, but neither saying another word. . . .

Fatou for her part understood perfectly that she might spoil everything if she opened her mouth. She only threw herself on her knees murmuring a negro prayer, and winding her arms about the Spahi's legs so that he dragged her after him as he moved.

But Jean, who hated the idea of the other seeing this affecting scene, told the girl roughly:

"Come, come, Fatou-gaye, leave me alone, please. Have you gone mad, I should like to know?"

But Pierre Boyer saw nothing ridiculous in the pair; far from it, he was touched.

At that moment a ray of morning sunlight, glinting over the yellow sand, flashed in at the open door, bringing out the scarlet of

the two men's uniforms, lighting up their fine energetic faces perplexed with anxiety and indecision, sparkling on the silver rings round Fatou's supple arms, which were writhing like snakes about Jean's knees, revealing the bare wretchedness of the African hut of wood and thatch, within whose walls these three young and helpless beings were to decide once for all their future fate . . .

"Peyral," went on the other Spahi, speaking in a soft, low voice, "the fact is, you see, Peyral, I am from Algeria, I am. You understand, down at Blidah yonder I have my dear brave old father and mother waiting for me; they have only me left. You must understand what it means for a man to get back home again."

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"Well then, yes!" said Jean, tossing his red cap back on his forehead and stamping his foot on the ground. "Yes, I agree, I will exchange and stay behind. . . ."

* * * * *

The Spahi Boyer seized his comrade in his arms and kissed him, while Fatou, still grovelling on the floor, gave a cry of triumph, and then hid her face against Jean's knees, with a sort of wild-beast gurgle in her throat, ending in a burst of spasmodic laughter and presently sinking into long-drawn sobs. . . .

* * * * *

XIX

There was every need for haste. Pierre Boyer darted off again as he had come, like a madman, carrying with him to Goree the precious paper to which poor Jean had set his signature in his great trooper's hand-writing, very correct and very legible.

Finally, just in time, everything was arranged, signed, countersigned and initialled, baggage shipped, the exchange effected,—all this put through so rapidly the two men had hardly had time to think.

At three precisely the steam-packet got under way, bearing Pierre Boyer away with her,—and leaving Jean behind.

XX

But no sooner was the thing done and irrevocable, and he found himself there on the sandy beach watching the vessel standing out to sea, than a frantic despair gripped his heart, a hideous anguish, in which were mingled terror at what he had just done, anger at Fatou-gaye, horror at the sight of his black mistress and a fierce impulse to spurn her away from him altogether. At the same time he was filled with a deep, passionate yearning for his beloved home and the cherished dear ones waiting for him there, whom he was not going to see after all. . . .

It seemed to him he had signed his own death-warrant, binding him for ever to this gloomy land, that hope was at an end for him. He set off at a run along the sand-dunes, without thinking much which way he was going,—merely to get air to breathe, to be alone, to let his eyes follow as long as possible the departing ship. . . .

* * * * *

The sun was still high in the heavens and scorchingly hot when he started, and the vast desert plains, seen thus in the full light, were strikingly impressive. He tramped for hours along the wild coast, keeping to the summits of the dunes or the top of the red cliffs, so as to obtain a wider view. A strong wind blew over his head, tossing into foam below him all the far-stretching levels of the sea, across which the steamer was speeding on her course. He had ceased to feel the blazing sun, so far afield were his wits wandering.

Tied and bound for another two years to this cursed land, when he might have been on board yonder, sailing the seas, on the way to his beloved village! . . . What dark influences, what powers of black magic, what spells and amulets, had kept him there only God could tell!

Two whole years! would the time ever end, would he ever find deliverance from the long, long banishment? . . .

He sped on and on northwards, not to lose the steamer from view for a while

longer. He tore his flesh on the thorns, while huge grasshoppers, which he disturbed in the long rank grass of the winter season as he went by, dashed in his face like hail. . . .

* * * * *

He was far away from human habitation, alone in the savage country of Cape Verde, a silent, deserted, mournful tract.

For a long time he had seen in front of him a huge tree, standing isolated and alone, bigger than the *baobabs* even, with thick-growing sombre foliage, something so enormous it seemed one of the vegetable giants of an older world, forgotten there by the passing ages.

He sat down in the shade of this vast dome of leaves, and dropping his head upon his breast, burst into tears. . . .

When he got up again, the vessel had disappeared and evening had fallen. By the evening light the place was sadder still and calmer and more depressing. In the twilight the great tree formed a mass of absolute blackness, set in the midst of the boundless African solitudes.

Before him stretched the infinite levels of the sea, which had now fallen calm again, while below at his feet were the cliffs, extending in terrace after terrace as far as Cape Verde, endless plains of a deadly sameness, furrowed by ravines, bare of all vegetation, a far-reaching landscape of a heart-breaking melancholy.

Behind, stretching inland as far as eye could reach, mysterious lines of low winding hills, and far-away *baobabs* outlined against the sky, looking like great branching corals.

Not a breath of air stirs the heavy atmosphere. The sun is sinking in the west amid thick wreaths of vapour, his yellow disk strangely magnified and deformed by the effects of mirage . . . Everywhere, in the sand, the *daturas* open their great white cups to the evening sky; the air is heavy with their sickly perfume and the poisonous scent of the *belladonna*. The night moths flit over their deadly blossoms, while the plaintive call of the doves sounds from among the tall grass on every side. All the soil of Africa is shrouded in a haze

of miasma and death, that already dims the far-off line of the dark horizon.

Yes, yonder behind him is the mysterious *interior*, of which he used once to dream dreams . . . Now, there is never a thing he has any curiosity to see; Podor and Medina, the land of Galam, even the remote and unknown Timbuctoo, there is not one of them he would care to visit!

All is gloom and discouragement now; he knows, or if he does not know he guesses, that each of these places is as odious as all the rest of this land he loathes. His thoughts are elsewhere, and his surroundings have come at last to frighten him. What he longs for now is to be rid of this nightmare existence,—to get away, to go somewhere else, at any cost!

* * * * *

A troop of tall, wild-looking native herdsmen pass by, driving before them their flocks of gaunt, hump-backed cattle.

The misshapen disk of the sun, which the Bible would have called 'a sign from

heaven,' slowly sinks and disappears, paling to the horizon and finally vanishing like a lurid meteor. Night is come, and darkness settles down on the fetid mists. The silence is unbroken by a sound; under the vast tree it is like a temple.

There he sits and pictures the thatched cottage at home at this same hour on summer evenings, and his old mother and his sweetheart. Everything seems at an end for him; he dreams he is dead, and will never see any of these things any more . . .

* * * * *

XXI

Well, the lot was cast now, he must abide his fate.

Two days later, Jean embarked, in his friend's stead, on board a gunboat of the French fleet, on his way to the distant frontier post of Gadiangue, in the Ouankarah. Some small reinforcements of men and *matériel* were being sent to this far-away, forlorn outpost. In the surrounding district trouble seemed brewing; the cara-

vans were interrupted, and quarrels were rife among the neighbouring native tribes and negro monarchs, each more rapacious and plundering than the other. It was supposed all this would end with the winter season; that in three or four months' time, as the Governor of Goree had promised Boyer, Jean would be on his way back to Saint-Louis, there to finish the period of his service.

The little gunboat was excessively crowded. To begin with, there was Fatou, who, by dint of persistency and cunning, had got herself allowed on board as the wife of a negro rifleman. Yes, there she was; she was one of the recognized *camp-followers*, with her four calabashes and all her other possessions.

There were half a score of Spahis from the garrison of Goree, whom the authorities were despatching to spend a season in exile at the frontier,—besides a score of native riflemen, bound for the same destination and accompanied thither by a full complement of wives and children.

It was a mighty strange *smalah* these fellows took along with them,—two or three wives apiece, to begin with, and a swarm of children; then by way of provisions, a store of millet in calabashes; then clothes and household utensils, likewise packed in calabashes; then, last but not least, amulets in heaps, and a swarm of domestic animals of every sort and kind.

At starting the crowding and confusion on board were indescribable. It seemed at first sight absolutely impossible for so many people and so much miscellaneous baggage to be stowed away.

But this was quite a mistake. In an hour's time everything was packed away and lashed in its proper place. The negress passengers were lying fast asleep on deck, wrapped in their waist-cloths, as tightly packed and as still as sardines in a box, while the ship ploughed along tranquilly to the southward, penetrating farther and farther into blue depths of distance where the heat grew greater every hour.

XXII

A night of utter calm on the equatorial sea,—and of utter silence, amid which the lightest rustle of canvas or cordage is audible. Now and again a Negress mutters in her sleep on deck, and men's voices ring out with a terrifying distinctness.

A languid torpor broods over everything and everybody; the air seems asleep, so still and motionless is it,—as if the universe were wrapped in slumber.

Above, the vast mirror of the sky, vibrating with heat; below, a milky, phosphorescent sea. The ship seems sailing between two mirrors set face to face, endlessly reflecting each other's surface,—sailing on and on in void emptiness, without limit and without horizon. Far away the two levels meet and mingle, every distinction merged and melted in boundless, indeterminate cosmic spaces.

The moon hangs low, like a great ball of red fire; she casts no rays, but her diffused light fills the atmosphere with a pale grey brilliance of phosphorescent vapour.

In the first days of the world's creation, before "God divided the light from the darkness," things must have worn this aspect of tranquillity and passive expectation. The periods of rest between the several acts of creation must have had this ineffable peacefulness,—in days when the worlds were not yet solidified, when light was still diffused and indefinitely distributed throughout the air, when the clouds hung heavy with lead and iron as yet unprecipitated, when all matter, eternally indestructible, was yet sublimated by the fervent heat of primitive chaos.

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XXIII

It is the fourth day of the voyage, and the sun rises half obscured in dazzling golden mists.

But what is this he reveals on the eastern horizon? A long green line,—at first a golden green flashing in the morning sun, but presently so bright a green, so impossibly green a green, it seems it can only be the handiwork of some Chinese artist

decorating a fan with colours of metallic brilliancy.

This long green line is the coast of Guinea. The ship has arrived off the mouth of the Diakhalleme River, and is now making for the broad entrance of the estuary.

The country is as flat as in Senegal, but nature wears a different aspect; it is the beginning of the region of evergreen vegetation, where the leaves never fall.

Everywhere spreads an astonishing verdure, a verdure already equatorial in character, eternally young and of an emerald green such as our trees never put on, not even in the splendours of the month of June.

Far as the eye can reach, it is one continuous forest, level and unbroken, the trees reflected in the hot, stagnant waters,—a sickly, unhealthy vegetation sprouting from a wet, swampy soil, that swarms with hideous reptiles.

XXIV

It was a mournful, silent land this too; but at any rate the sight of green trees was

restful to the eye after those everlasting stretches of desert sand.

The vessel cast anchor at the village of Poupoubal on the Diakhalleme, being unable to proceed farther up stream.

There the passengers were disembarked, to wait for the native boats and canoes that were to convey them to their final destination.

XXV

On a July evening, at nine o'clock, Jean took his place along with Fatou and the Spahis from Goree in a canoe manned by ten negro rowers, under the orders of Samba-Boubou, known as a good captain and skilled pilot on all the rivers of the Guinea coast. Their destination was the post of Gadiangue, situated several leagues up stream.

The night was cloudless, but there was no moon,—a hot, starlit equatorial night. The boat slipped through the calm water at an astonishing speed, borne onwards towards the interior by a strong flowing tide and the unrelaxing efforts of the oarsmen.

The banks on either hand glided by in the darkness, the great forest trees filing past mile after mile, looking like black phantoms in the gloom.

Samba-Boubou led the chant of his negro boatmen, his thin, plaintive voice starting on a high note, then dropping in a long-drawn pathetic wail to the very bottom of the scale. Then the rest took up the same cadence in chorus, with a slow, solemn intonation. Hour after hour the same strange, wild phrase was repeated, followed by the same answering notes from the rowers. . . . For a long while the words were in praise of the Spahis, extolling their merits, and those of their horses and even of their dogs; presently they took up the panegyric of the warriors of the tribe of Soumaree, and again of Saboutane, a legendary heroine of the Gambia regions.

When fatigue and sleepiness slackened the regular swing of the oars, Samba-Boubou would whistle shrilly between his teeth, and the same snake-like hiss would be caught up by all, and would reanimate their energies like magic. . . .

Thus they glided along all night past great woods, the *sacred groves* of the Mandingo religion. The ancient forest trees stretched above their heads massive branches grey with moss, showing gnarled and angular, like gigantic skeletons or grotesque shapes of carved stone, against the diffused glow of the stars,—then sliding past and disappearing. . . .

With the Negroes' boat-song and the ripple of flowing water were mingled the sinister cries of the howling apes in the woods and the screams of the wild birds in the marshes,—all the mournful sounds of night reverberating in the depths of the forest. . . . Human voices could be heard too at times, death shrieks from far away, gun-shots and the dull throbbing of war drums. Then reflexions of great fires would appear at distant points above the trees, when the boat passed the outskirts of some native village; for there was already fighting going on far and near,—Sarakholes against Landoumans, Nalous against Toubacayes, and villages were burning in all directions.

Then, for leagues together, all fell back into silence again,—the deep silence of night and of vast forest spaces. But the stream bore them on and on unceasingly, to the same accompaniment of monotonous chant and steady splash of oars. It was a weird, fantastic journey, as through a land of dreams; the tall contorted branches of the tall palms sweeping past above their heads, the forests gliding away on either hand hour after hour. . . . Their speed seemed to be ever increasing, though the stream was singularly diminished now in volume. It was only a narrow watercourse now, running under huge trees, but leading them on farther and farther into the interior through the thick darkness.

The blacks never ceased to sing their strange songs of panegyric, nor Samba-Boubou to utter his wild head note, that mingled with the yells of the forest apes, and was answered by the mournful refrain of the Negroes in chorus. They sang in a sort of dream, rowing furiously, as if galvanized in a very fever of impatience to

arrive, with a vigour that seemed superhuman.

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At last! . . . the stream enters a defile between two rows of wooded hills. Lights wave far above on the summit of a great rock that looms up before them, then come hurrying down to the river banks. Samba-Boubou lights a torch and gives a rallying cry. It is the people of Gadiangue coming out to meet them; they have reached the goal at last.

Gadiangue stands there perched on the top of yonder vertical crag. The newcomers climb laboriously up to it by arduous paths, the blacks lighting the way with torches. On arrival, all go to sleep on mats spread in a large hut that has been made ready for them, waiting for daybreak, which is not far off now.

XXVI

Jean was the first to awake after a short hour's sleep. On opening his eyes, he saw the white daylight just beginning to filter in

between the planks of a wooden hut, lighting up a number of young soldiers lying asleep half naked on mats, their heads pillowed on their red jackets. All were light-haired men of the north,—from Brittany, Alsace, Picardy. At this moment of waking Jean beheld as in a sort of mystic vision the divers fates awaiting all these exiles, wasting their lives in a foreign land, living in daily peril of disease and violence and death.

Then suddenly, close at his side, he saw a graceful woman's shape, and two rounded black arms encircled with silver bangles that reached out towards him, as if to clasp him in their embrace.

So little by little he realized how he had arrived in the night at this far-away village of Guinea, lost amid vast tracts of savagery, where he was farther than ever from home and country, so far away that even letters could no longer reach him.

Moving noiselessly, not to disturb Fatou and his comrades, who were still asleep, he stepped to the open window, and looked out over the unknown country he had come to.

He commanded a sheer precipice three hundred feet in height. The hut where he was seemed as it were suspended in the air over the edge. Below him stretched an inland landscape, just visible in the pale light of earliest dawn,—with abrupt hills, clothed with vegetation such as he had never seen before.

Right underneath flowed the river by which he had come, looking like a long silver ribbon meandering over mud flats half hidden by wreaths of morning mist. From the height where he stood the caymans sprawling on the banks looked no bigger than lizards. A strange, unfamiliar perfume was in the air.

At the foot of the rock lay the rowers asleep, just where they had landed yesterday, huddled over their oars in the canoe.

XXVII

A limpid stream coursed along a bed of dark-coloured boulders, between two wet, polished walls of rock. Trees met in an arch

above, and the whole aspect of the spot was so cool and fresh as to suggest any other place rather than a far-away corner in the depths of equatorial Africa.

All about were crowds of naked women, of the same hue as the rocks, their bodies a ruddy brown, the hair a shade of amber. They were busy washing their waist-cloths, and telling each other with much lively gesticulation the encounters and adventures of the past night. A band of fighting men were fording the stream a little lower down, armed from head to foot, evidently marching away to the wars.

* * * * *

Jean was taking his first stroll about the village to which his new destiny had just brought him for a period the length of which he could not tell. Trouble was undoubtedly brewing, and the little post of Gadiangue already foresaw the moment when it must close its gates to give native politics time to subside again into quietude—very much as a man shuts to his window to keep out a passing shower of rain.

Well, he found it all lively and exciting, and to the last degree new and original. There were green trees and brilliant flowers, mountains and running streams, all nature alive and bright and almost terrible in its splendour. . . . It was certainly a change from the drab monotony of the coast, and there was food in plenty for a healthy curiosity.

* * * * *

Suddenly in the distance the beating of tom-toms booms out—the war-drums approaching. Now the wild music is close at hand, loud and deafening, and the women washing in the clear stream, and Jean with them, lift their heads and gaze up into the blue strip of sky framed between the polished walls of rock. It is an allied native chief passing with his troops above their heads, climbing like monkeys across a precarious bridge formed of the trunks of felled trees. There they go, in battle array, war-music in the van; the sun flashes from the weapons and amulets of the chieftain's attendants, as the whole band goes by with a light, active gait, under the scorching sun.

It is nearly midday when Jean finally mounts to the village again by devious woodland paths.

Surrounded and overshadowed by great trees, the huts of Gadiangue are grouped in a shady spot — tall, almost elegant constructions with great overhanging roofs of thatch. At this hour the women are either asleep on mats spread on the ground, or are sitting in the shelter of the verandahs crooning their babes asleep with slow, soft lullabies. Meantime the warriors, armed from head to foot, are boasting of their exploits of yesterday, as they wipe their long knives.

* * * * *

No, it is a change for the better decidedly. True the air is terribly hot and oppressive ; but it is not the exhausting and prostrating heat of the banks of the Senegal River, and here at any rate circulates the vivifying sap of equatorial life and vigour.

Jean looks about him, and feels himself alive. He no longer regrets having come ; his imagination had not pictured anything

like this. In years to come, at home, when he is back in the old country, he will be glad to have set foot in this far-off region and to let his thoughts dwell upon its wonders.

Yes, he sees in this sojourn in the Ouankarah a pleasant time of freedom to spend in a marvellous land of sport and greenery and forest; he welcomes it as a grateful respite to the crushing monotony of his days, the killing sameness of his time of exile.

XXVIII

Jean possessed an old silver watch, to which he was as fondly attached as Fatou herself to her amulets—his father's watch, which the latter had presented to him at the moment of his quitting home. With a certain medallion he wore in his bosom, fastened round his neck by a cord, it was the object of all others he valued most in the world.

The medallion bore the image of the Virgin. It had been placed there by his mother, once when he was ill, as quite a child, quite a little lad. . . . Yet he per-

fectly remembered the day on which the medallion had been slipped into the place it had never quitted since. He was lying in his child's little bed, suffering from some childish illness—the only one he had ever had in his life. One time waking up, he had seen his mother beside him crying; it was a winter's afternoon, and you could see the snow out of window lying like a great white cloak on the mountain-side. Then his mother, raising his little head softly, had passed the medallion round his neck; after which she had kissed him, and he had dropped off asleep again.

It was more than fifteen years since that day; since then his neck had grown thicker and his chest filled out amazingly, but the cherished medallion had always kept its place. He had never felt so sick and sorry as once, the first night he ever spent in a house of ill fame, when a girl had touched the sacred medallion with her hand, and the degraded creature had burst into a great coarse laugh. . . .

For the watch, it had been bought some

forty years before, second-hand, by his father, when he was with the colours, out of savings from his pay. Once upon a time, it appears it had been a very noteworthy watch; but nowadays it was a trifle old-fashioned, being a fat, bulbous repeater, a glance at which was enough to betray its venerable antiquity.

His father still looked upon it as an object of rare and superior qualities. Watches were by no means common possessions among the rude mountaineers of his native Cévennes. Then the watchmaker at a neighbouring town who had repaired it at the time of Jean's leaving for service, had said the movement was very curious. So his old father had put this companion of his youth into his hands with many injunctions to value it and be careful of it.

Jean had worn the ancient timekeeper at first. But lo! he soon found that, every time he consulted it among his comrades, the act was greeted with shouts of derisive laughter. Such cutting jests had been uttered about "that old onion" of Peyral's

that again and again the poor fellow had blushed red with anger and vexation. Rather than hear his watch treated with such marked disrespect, why, he would liefer have brooked the worst insults to himself, would sooner have received a slap in the face himself, which at any rate he could have returned with interest. These repeated slights hurt the more as he could not but admit in his own mind that the dear old thing was really and truly something out of date. He only loved it the better; it gave him indescribable pangs to see it thus despised, and above all to have to recognize the comicality of its looks himself.

Then he had left off wearing it, to spare it such-like affronts. He had even ceased to wind it up, so as to save wear and tear, more particularly as after the shock of travelling and under the influence of the tropical climate to which its constitution was unused, it had taken to making the most outrageous mistakes, and playing fast and loose with the time of day in the most unheard-of fashion.

So he had packed it carefully and affec-

tionately away in a chest where he kept his most valued treasures, his letters and his little memorials of home. It was his *fetish* box, one of those sacred receptacles that sailors always carry about with them, and soldiers too, sometimes.

Fatou had express orders not to touch it under any circumstances. But the watch was an irresistible attraction. She had found means to open the precious chest, taught herself to wind up the watch unaided, when Jean was well out of the way, and set the hands moving and the ting-ting of the repeating action sounding. Putting it close to her ear, she would listen to the little cracked notes with the inquisitive antics of a chimpanzee that has found a musical-box.

XXIX

Never the faintest sensation of coolness or relief at Gadiangue, not even the fresh nights, such as the winter season had to offer in Senegal.

From earliest morning, under the gorgeous

tropical vegetation, the same heavy, deadly heat; from earliest morning, before sunrise even, in the great woods, peopled with screaming apes, green parrots, and rare humming-birds, in the forest paths winding under the thick foliage, in the tall, wet grasses through which the snakes glide stealthily, always, at all hours and in all places, the same hothouse temperature—moist, exhausting, pestilential. . . . Day and night, and all day and all night long, the thick, hot, oppressive air of the equatorial regions is condensed and concentrated under the great leaves of the mighty forest trees, and everywhere it reeks with fever. . . .

At the end of three months, as had been foreseen, the countryside had settled down again. The negro war and its accompanying slaughter and violence were over. The caravans began to circulate as before, bringing to Gadiangue from the remote interior of the continent, gold, ivory, feathers, all the products of the Sudan and the Guinea hinterland.

So the order went forth to call in the rein-

forcements again, and a vessel was despatched to pick up the Spahis at the mouth of the river and bring them back to Senegal.

Alas! the complement was not full! Poor lads! out of a dozen who had gone, two missed the roll-call for return; two lay in the steaming soil of Gadiangue, victims to the equatorial fever.

But Jean's hour was not yet come; and one day he found himself re-travelling in the opposite direction the route he had traversed three months before in Samba-Boubou's canoe.

XXX

The journey was by daylight this time, in a Mandingo canoe, under shelter of an awning kept constantly wet.

The course lay as before between thickly wooded banks, often passing under the overhanging branches and pendant roots of the trees, to take advantage of the scanty shade they cast, stifling and pestilential as such shade was.

The stream seemed to stand still in stag-

nant pools; the water was as thick and greasy as oil, with little films of miasmatic vapour floating here and there over the polished surface.

The sun was at its zenith; its beams beat down perpendicularly from out a sky of grey-violet, having a sort of a dull metallic lustre, as though tarnished by the poisonous exhalations of the swamps.

The heat was so terrible even the black rowers were obliged to call a spell in spite of their indomitable spirit. The tepid water refused to quench their thirst; they were utterly exhausted, the very strength of their bones running away in sweat.

But even when they stopped rowing, the canoe, borne softly along by an almost imperceptible current, still went on its course downstream. Then the Spahis could see at close quarters this strange, unique world,—could realize what it was like under the mangroves, that flourish so luxuriantly in all the vast marshes of equatorial Africa.

There in the dim intricacy of the enormous roots, the creatures of this underworld

sprawled and dozed. There, within two yards of them as they slipped noiselessly past, gliding so silently the very birds never stirred, so close they could have touched them, lay great blue-green caymans, stretched luxuriously on the mud-banks, opening their great, slimy jaws in a mighty yawn, a sleepy, good-humoured, silly look in their winking eyes. Then there were little white egrets sitting asleep too, rolled into a snowy ball perched atop of one long leg, standing so as not to soil their pretty plumage, on the very backs of the basking alligators. Then there were kingfishers of every vivid shade of blue and green taking their siesta on branches just above the surface of the water, cheek by jowl with lazy-looking lizards. Then there were huge butterflies of amazing size and splendour, developed in this hot-house atmosphere, slowly opening and shutting their wings; they rested on every leaf and spray, looking for all the world like dead leaves, when closed, flashing open like some magic jewel case, sparkling with iridescent blues and glints of metallic radiance.

Then there were the mangrove roots, millions and millions, everywhere, roots and roots and roots, hanging down like great skeins of thread, of all lengths and thicknesses, intertwining and intertwisting in all directions. They were like ugly grey arms, eager to enfold and embrace and imprison. Vast stretches of country are encumbered by these multitudinous mangrove roots. Then swarming over these, and every mudbank, and even the caymans themselves, were scuttling hosts of great land-crabs, for ever waving their one claw, dead white like ivory, as if still fishing in their dreams for an imaginary prey. This nightmare movement of the hideous swarms was the only activity to be seen in all that sleeping world.

* * * * *

When the black rowers had recovered their breath, they softly resumed their wild chant and fell to their oars again with the same furious energy. The canoe clove the still waters of the Diakhalleme, and sped on its way down the tortuous stream,

slipping rapidly along between the wooded banks.

As they drew nearer the sea, the hills and mighty forest trees of the interior were gradually left behind. Once more extended a dead flat as far as the eye could see, overgrown everywhere by an inextricable tangle of mangroves that covered all the surface with an unbroken mantle of green.

* * * * *

The exhaustion of noonday was over now, and a few birds were on the wing. But the silence was still almost unbroken in this lonely land; everywhere the same monotonous landscape, the same everlasting trees, the same deathly calm. Either side, an endless line of mangroves, forming an interminable vista that recalled the familiar poplars of the rivers of France.

Right and left, at intervals, opened other waterways, equally silent and deserted, that wound away into the distance, bordered by the same eternal curtain of everlasting verdure. It needed all Samba-Boubou's con-

summate knowledge of the rivers to find his way through this labyrinth of affluents and devious branches.

Not a sound or a movement was to be heard except the occasional splash of a hippopotamus plunging noisily into the water, interrupting the balanced swish of the oars and leaving great eddying circles on the polished surface of the dull, steaming pools.

Then Fatou would shut her eyes tighter than ever, where she lay in the bottom of the canoe for safety, a twofold screen of leaves and wet cloths wrapped round her head to make security doubly sure. She had taken care to make inquiries beforehand, and knew very well what sort of beasts she must expect to find on the river banks.

She travelled the whole journey to Poupoubal without once daring to look at a single thing all the way. To get her to move, on arrival there, Jean had first to assure her solemnly they were really at their journey's end, and secondly, that it was night and pitch dark, so that the danger was veritably over for the present.

She was all numbed with crouching in the bottom of the boat, and answered his appeal in a pitiful little voice like a spoilt child's. She besought Jean to take her up in his arms and carry her himself on board the Goree ship, and she had her will. These little ways were pretty sure of success with the poor, kind-hearted fellow, who often let himself spoil Fatou—for sheer need of someone to pet, someone to love, and no one better being to hand.

XXXI

The Governor of Goree did not forget the promise he had given to the Spahi, Pierre Boyer. On his return from the interior, Jean was duly sent back to Saint-Louis, to finish out his period of exile in the old spot.

Jean could not but feel some emotion to see the familiar land of sand and the white town once more; he was attached to it, as a man must be to any place where he has suffered and lived long. Then he experienced a certain pleasure just at first in re-

turning to what was almost a town, to something resembling civilization, in resuming the habits and meeting the friends of old days. He did not really care a straw for any of these things, but absence and deprivation made him feel happy for the moment to have them back.

Lodgings are not in great demand at Saint-Louis of Senegal. The old quarters in Samba-Hamet's house were still vacant; Coura-n'diaye saw Jean and Fatou approaching her door, and readily opened it to her former guests.

The days resumed for the Spahi the same monotonous course as of old.

XXXII

Not a thing was changed at Saint-Louis. The same tranquillity reigned in their district as ever; the tame *marabous* clacked their beaks as they sunned themselves luxuriously, with the same dull sound as of dry wood or the creaking sails of a windmill.

The Negresses, as ever, were pounding

kousskouss: everywhere the same old familiar sounds, the same monotonous silence, the same coma of exhausted nature.

But every day Jean's sick weariness of it all grew greater.

Every day, too, he felt less attached to Fatou; he was beginning to experience a positive repulsion towards his black mistress. Besides, Fatou-gaye had grown more imperious and more unreasonable than ever in her caprices—more especially since she had learned the influence she wielded over Jean's mind, since he had consented to stay in Africa for her sake.

There were frequent scenes between the two; sometimes she drove him beyond all patience by dint of her perversity and wrong-headedness. Presently he began to correct her with his whip, mildly enough at first, but more severely as time went on. On Fatou's naked back the blows often left marks that looked like a sort of cross-hatching—black on black. When it was done he was sorry and felt ashamed of himself.

One day, coming back to the house, he had seen from a long way off a Khassonkee, a great, black gorilla of a fellow, leap lightly out of a window and make off. He had said nothing however for the moment; after all, what did he care what she might be at? . . .

Any sentiments of pity, or maybe tenderness, he might once have entertained for the girl were over and done with; he had had enough of it, he was weary of her and sick and disgusted. It was due solely to *vis inertiae* that he kept her still.

His last year of service was begun; the end seemed quite close, and home at hand. He was actually counting by months now.

Sleep had deserted him, as generally happens in the long run in these debilitating climates. He spent hour after hour at night standing at the window, his elbows resting on the sill, breathing in with intense pleasure the cool airs of his last winter season, and dreaming fondly of his approaching return.

The moon, as she finished her tranquil course across the desert, generally found him still there at his window. He loved these

lovely tropical nights, these rosy reflexions on the sand, these silvery streaks along the sad, still waters of the river. Every night the wind brought him from the plains of Sorr the distant cry of the jackals—even this lugubrious sound had grown familiar and almost friendly to his ear.

When he remembered that very soon he was to quit all these scenes for ever, the thought cast a certain shadow of vague sadness over the anticipated joy of his return.

XXXIII

It was several days since Jean had opened his treasure box and looked to see if his old watch was still safe. He was in barracks on duty when suddenly the fact struck him and stirred a feeling of anxiety in his bosom.

That day he strode home at a quicker pace than usual, and on reaching the house went straight to the chest and threw the lid open.

His heart stood still; the watch was not to be seen! . . . With feverish haste he

removed the various objects. . . . But no, it was gone! . . .

Fatou was humming to herself with a fine air of indifference as she watched his proceedings from a corner. She was stringing beads, matching the different colours to make one of her gaudy necklaces, in preparation for the next day's festivities, the *bamboulas* of the Tabaski, at which she must present a brave show.

"You have put it away somewhere else? Speak, Fatou, tell me quick. . . . You know I forbade you ever to touch it! Now where have you put it? . . ."

"*Ram!*" (I don't know!) Fatou answered nonchalantly.

A cold sweat began to bead Jean's forehead; he was half wild with anger and anxiety. He seized the girl by the arm and shook her roughly.

"Where have you put it? . . . Come, quick, tell me!"

"*Ram!*"

Then a sudden light flashed upon him; he had just caught sight of a new waist-cloth,

with blue and pink zigzag stripes, carefully folded up and hidden away in a corner—all ready for to-morrow's festival! . . .

He understood it all, and snatching up the tell-tale garment, he unfolded it, and tossing it on the floor—

"You have sold it," he cried, "you have sold the watch! Come, Fatou, quick, tell the truth! . . ."

He forced her to her knees on the floor, and picked up his riding-whip.

She knew quite well she had meddled with a precious *fetish*, and would get into serious trouble, but long impunity had emboldened her; she had so often been in mischief before, and Jean had always forgiven her.

But, but she had never seen Jean look like this before; she gave a cry of real terror, and fell to kissing his feet.

"Forgive me, Tjean! . . . Oh! forgive me!"

* * * * *

Jean did not realize how strong he was when he was really angry. He had some-

thing of the wild uncontrollable passions of children reared in the woods. He thrashed Fatou unmercifully on her bare back, raising great weals from which the blood spurted; the fiercer his blows, the more savage grew his rage. . . .

Then suddenly he felt ashamed of what he had done, and tossing away his whip he sank down on his *tara*. . ...

XXXIV

In another moment Jean was off at a run for the market-place of Guet-n'dar.

Fatou had confessed at last and given the name of the negro dealer to whom she had sold the watch. Jean hoped it might be still in his hands, and that he might be able to buy it back, the poor dear old watch; he had just received his month's pay, and the sum would be enough for his purpose.

He went at his best speed, running most of the way; he was in the utmost haste to get there, thinking some black purchaser might be on the spot at that very minute,

bargaining for the treasure and on the point of carrying it off.

* * * * *

There at Guet-n'dar, on the sand, was a scene of much noise and pushing and confusion, a babel of all the tongues current in the Sudan. It is the great market, held every day, to which flock people of all countries, where every commodity is bought and sold, precious things and worthless rubbish, articles of utility and articles of extravagance, commodities the most incongruous — gold and butter, meat and unguents, sheep and manuscripts, slaves and broth, amulets and vegetables.

On one side, framing the picture, a branch of the river with the town of Saint-Louis beyond—its straight formal lines and Babylonian terraces, its bluish whitewash varied by patches of red brick, here and there the yellow plume of a palm relieved against the sky.

On the other side, Guet-n'dar, the swarming negro ant-hill with its thousands of pointed roofs.

Near by are caravans halted within reach of the market, camels lying resting on the sand, Moorish traders unloading their bales of ground-nuts, their fetish-bags of embroidered leather.

Traders of every sort, men and women, squatted on the sand, laughing or quarrelling, elbowed and jostled and trodden upon, they and their goods, by the crowds of buyers.

"Hou! dièndé m'pât!" . . . (sellers of sour milk, kept in goat-skins sewn into bags with the hair turned inwards).

"Hou! dièndé nébam!" . . . (sellers of butter, of the Peuhle race these women, wearing huge three-cornered headdresses ornamented with little plates of copper, fishing for their wares with both hands in hairy skin-bags, rolling it between their fingers into little dirty balls at one sou each, then drying their paws afterwards on their greasy hair).

"Hou! dièndé kheul! . . . dièndé khorompolé!" . . . (sellers of simples, little parcels of magic herbs, lizards' tails and roots possessed of mysterious virtues).

"Hou! diéndé tchiakhkha! . . . diéndé djiarab!" . . . (sellers of gold-dust, squatting in the sand like the rest, and flakes of jade, amber beads and silver jewellery—all the goods displayed on dirty, ragged cloths spread on the ground, over which customers go trampling).

"Hou! diéndé guerté! . . . diéndé khankhel! . . . diéndé iap-nior!" . . . (sellers of pistachio-nuts and live ducks and strange dainties—strips of meat dried in the sun and fly-blown sugar-cakes).

Salt-fish sellers, pipe sellers, sellers of everything under the sun, sellers of second-hand jewellery, of old filthy, lousy waist-cloths, smelling like a dead man's shroud, of Galam butter to keep the hair crisp, of little pigtails of false hair, cut or torn from dead negresses' heads, to serve their living sisters' needs more or less well, all ready plaited and curled and gummed.

Sellers of *grigris*, amulets, old muskets, gazelle dung, ancient copies of the Koran annotated by pious Marabouts of the Sahara; sellers of musk, flutes, old poniards with

silver hafts, old steel knives that have ripped up bellies before now, tom-toms, giraffe horns and old guitars.

All the vagabonds and choicest rascality of the negro town are seated round the outskirts under the stunted yellow cocoanut-palms—old leprous women holding out ulcerous palms to ask an alms, old men, skeletons more dead than alive, with legs hideously swollen by elephantiasis, great bloated flies and worms feeding on their open sores.

The ground is thick with camel dung and negro excrement, strewn with rubbish of all sorts and heaps of filth. Above it all, blazing down vertically, a scorching sun that seems to burn just over one's head, the rays blistering the skin like the flame of a brazier that has been put too near.

And always and everywhere, the desert, the boundless flatness of the desert, forms the sole boundary and horizon.

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It was there, in front of the goods displayed for sale by a certain Bob-Bakary-Diam, that Jean stopped, questioning with a quick, anxious look and a beating heart, the pile of miscellaneous articles heaped up before his eyes.

"Ah! yes, white man," said Bob-Bakary-Diam in Yolof, with an imperturbable smile, "yes, the watch that strikes? Four days ago the girl came to sell it me for three silver *khâliss*. Very sorry, white man; but as it struck the time, I sold it again the very same day—to a chief of Trarzas, who is on his way by now with a caravan for Timbuctoo.

* * * * *

So, it was finished! . . . No use thinking any more about the poor old watch! . . .

Jean had a feeling of positive despair, poor fellow, a sensation of heart-break, as if he had by his own fault lost a beloved friend.

If only it had been still in his power to go and throw his arms about his old father's neck and ask his pardon, that would have been some consolation. Nay, if it had tum-

bled in the sea, the watch, or been lost in a river or some far-away corner of the desert —but sold like this, profaned by Fatou's sordid hands! . . . Oh, it was too much! . . . He felt he could have cried if his heart had not been boiling so with rage against the perfidious creature.

It was the same Fatou who for four years now had been stealing his money and his dignity and his very life! . . . To keep her he had sacrificed his promotion, his whole future in the army—for her sake he had stayed on in Africa, for this little ill-conditioned, perverse creature, black in face and black in soul, surrounded by amulets and spells and charms! His anger burned hotter and hotter, as he strode along in the sun; he was filled with a kind of superstitious horror of her magic arts, combined with a mad fury at her mischievous, impudent ways, and the audacious piece of wickedness she had just been guilty of. He reached home after a rapid walk, his blood boiling, his head on fire, his whole nature exasperated by grief and anger.

XXXV

Fatou was still there, waiting his return with profound anxiety.

The instant he came into the room, she could see he had not recovered the old repeater. His face was so sad and stern, she thought he was most likely going to kill her.

She could understand that; why, if any one had robbed *her* of a certain shrivelled-up amulet of hers, the most precious of all she possessed, one her mother had given her when she was a tiny girl away in Galam—surely she would have thrown herself upon the thief and killed him there and then, if she could.

She could quite understand she had done something very bad indeed—the bad spirits had made her, and her besetting sin, too great a love of finery. Yes, she knew she was bad and wicked. She was sorry she had hurt Jean so; she was ready to die,—but she longed to kiss him first.

When he beat her, she almost liked it

now, because these were very nearly the only occasions when he touched her, and she could touch him, as she pressed close against him to ask forgiveness. This time, when he was going to lay hands upon her to kill her, as she would have nothing left to risk now, she would put out all her strength to twine her arms round him and try to reach up to his lips; then she would cling there, kissing him and kissing him till she was dead—and she would die content!

* * * * *

If Jean could have read what was passing in that little despairing soul, no doubt he would have forgiven her, poor fellow, once again, to his undoing; it was not difficult to soften that manly heart.

But Fatou said nothing, knowing all this could never be put into words, and flattered by the notion of this final struggle when she would hold him in her arms and kiss him, and die by his hands. She only waited, her great clear eyes fixed on his with a look of passionate love and terror.

But Jean had come back, and now he would not speak to her, would not so much as look at her—and now she could not understand at all.

He had even thrown down his whip when he came in, because he felt ashamed of having been brutal to a girl, and did not want to begin again.

Instead, he had started tearing down all the amulets hanging on the walls and pitching them out of the windows.

Next he took the waist-cloths, necklaces, *boubous*, calabashes—and still without a word, hurled them out on to the sand.

Then Fatou began to understand what was to be her doom: she guessed all was over and done with, and was overwhelmed with utter, hopeless misery.

When everything belonging to her was removed, and lay littering the ground outside, Jean pointed to the door, saying between his clenched white teeth in a low, stern voice that allowed of no reply, the one word,

"Go!"

And Fatou, her head bent low, went without a sound.

No, she had never imagined anything so dreadful as to be turned away like this. She felt she would go mad, and she walked slowly away without lifting her head, without finding a cry to utter, or a word to say, or a tear to shed.

XXXVI

Then Jean set to work quietly to collect whatever property was his, folding up his effects neatly, as if he were packing his soldier's knapsack; he did it all carefully and methodically, by force of habit, having learned orderliness despite himself in the regiment, yet with what haste he might, afraid of yielding even now to overmastering regret and pity.

He found a certain sense of consolation in his determined act and the satisfaction accorded the memory of the old watch. He was glad to have made a definite end of everything, telling himself he would be embracing his father one day soon, and

confessing the whole story and asking his forgiveness.

Presently, when he had finished, he went down to Coura-n'diaye, the Griot woman. He saw Fatou, who had taken refuge there, lying motionless, crouched in a corner. The little slave girls had collected her scattered belongings outside and stowed them in a row of calabashes near her.

Jean would not so much as look at her. He stepped up to Coura-n'diaye, and paid his month's lodging, giving her notice he would not be coming back any more; this done, he threw his scanty baggage across his shoulders, and left the house.

* * * * *

Poor old watch. His father had told him: "Yes, Jean, it is a trifle old-fashioned, but it is a very good watch; I shouldn't wonder if they don't make such good ones any more. When you are a rich man later on, you must buy yourself one in the fashion, if you like; but you will give me back the old one. It is forty years ago I used to wear it first; I

had it when I was with the colours. When I am buried, if you don't want it any more, don't fail to put it in my coffin; it will be company for me. . . ."

* * * * *

Coura-n'diaye had taken the Spahi's money without troubling her head about his leaving her house so suddenly; had she not been a courtesan in her time, and been broken in to every kind of caprice?

When once Jean was outside, he called his *laobe* dog to heel, and it slouched after him with drooping ears, as if it understood the situation and was sorry to go. Then Jean marched off, without once turning his head, through the long streets of the deserted town, making in the direction of the barracks.

* * * * *

THIRD PART

THIRD PART

I

WHEN once Jean had definitely turned out Fatou-gaye, he found a vast relief in what he had done. When he had suitably arranged in his locker at barracks his slender store of belongings from Samba-Hamet's house, he felt happier and more independent. It seemed to him a step towards the final departure, the longed-for "full-discharge," that was only a few months off now.

Still he pitied the poor girl. He was fain to send her for the last time his monthly pay, to help her to a fresh start, or to defray her journey elsewhere.

However, as he preferred not to see her again, he had entrusted his comrade Muller with the commission.

Muller had duly proceeded to Samba-Hamet's house, and seen the old Griot woman. But Fatou was gone.

"She was very, very sad," the little slave-girls told him in Yolof, crowding round him and all jabbering at once.

"That evening she would not touch the *kousskouss* we made her."

"In the night," added little Sam-Lele, "I heard her talking in her sleep—and even the *laobes* growled, which is a sure sign of misfortune! But I could not make out what she said."

At any rate there was no doubt she was gone, carrying her calabashes with her on her head, a little before sunrise.

An old baboon, by name Bafoufale-Diop, chief of the Griot's slave-girls, a woman of a very inquisitive disposition, had followed her at a distance, and seen her cross the wooden bridge over the small arm of the river, making for N'dar-toute, and apparently *knowing very well where she was bound for.*

It was conjectured in the district that she had most likely gone to seek refuge with a

certain very rich old Marabout of N'dartoute, who was known to admire her greatly. She was good-looking enough anyway to be in no fear of starving, *keffir* though she was.

For a while longer Jean took care not to go near Coura-n'diaye's neighbourhood. Then, after a time, he thought no more about the matter.

Indeed he considered himself to have now recovered his dignity as a *white man*, smirched by contact with a black girl; his infatuation was a thing of the past, and the fever of his senses overheated by the tropical climate was appeased. The whole affair only inspired him, when he looked back upon it, with a feeling of deep disgust.

He proceeded to frame a new existence for himself, an existence of continence and cleanly living. For the future he meant to live in barracks, like a sober, sensible man. He would save up his money, so as to take home to Jeanne Méry a host of presents from Senegal—fine mats that would later on adorn the little home so often dreamt of,

embroidered waist-cloths, the brilliant colours of which would move the admiration of their neighbours, and which would make splendid tablecloths for the house—then, more important still, earrings and a cross of fine gold of Galam, which he would have made expressly for her by the best native workmen. She should wear these ornaments on Sundays, when she walked to church with the Peyrals, and for sure no other girl in the village would have such fine jewellery to show.

The tall young Spahi, with the serious face, formed a whole series of such-like almost boyish projects in his poor unsophisticated head—simple dreams of domestic happiness and family joys and peaceful home life.

Jean was then about six-and-twenty, though he looked more than his age, as is often the case with men who have lived the hard life of the fields, the sea, or the camp. His five years in Africa had changed him greatly; his features were more pronounced, he was thinner and more deeply tanned, he looked more the soldier, and more the Arab;

shoulders and chest had broadened a great deal, though the waist was as slim and supple as ever. By this time he could cock his fez and twirl his brown moustaches with a fine military swagger that became him to perfection. His great strength and extraordinary good looks inspired a sort of involuntary respect among all who came in contact with him; people spoke in a different tone somehow to him from what they used to ordinary red-coats. A painter might well have taken him as the perfected type of noble bearing and manly beauty.

II

One day, in the same cover, which bore the postmark of his village, Jean found two letters—one from his dear old mother, the other from Jeanne.

Letter from Françoise Peyral to her son:—

"My dear boy,

"There is news indeed since my last letter, and you will be very much surprised. But do not make yourself miserable just at

once; you must do as we do, dear boy, you must pray to God and always keep a good heart. I must begin by telling you a new 'huissier' has come to our parts, a young man, M. Prosper Suirot. He is not over and above liked, you must know, for he is hard on poor folks and has a sly way with him; still he has a fine position, there's no denying that. Well, this fine M. Suirot has asked Jeanne's hand of your uncle Méry, who has accepted him for a son-in-law. Now one evening Méry came to our house and made a terrible scene; he had had inquiries made about you of your colonels, without ever a word to us, and the replies were bad, it appears. They say you kept a negro wife out there, that you *would* go on living with her in spite of all your officers said to you. This is what stopped your being made quartermaster-sergeant, they said. And there were other bad reports about you out there—many things, dear lad, I could never, never believe of you; though it was all written down in a printed paper he showed us, sealed with the seal of your regiment, too. Next, Jeanne came to take refuge with us, all crying and declaring she would never marry that Suirot fellow, that

she would never be anybody's wife but yours, my dear Jean. She swore she would rather go into a convent else. She has written you a letter, which I send you, in which she directs you what you are to do; she is of age, and she has a good head on her shoulders; so be sure and do just what she tells you, and write by return of post to your uncle, as she bids you. We are to see you back in six months, my dear son; if you only behave well from now to the end of your time, and pray earnestly to God to help you, no doubt it can all be arranged yet. Still we are very anxious and unhappy, as you may suppose; besides, we are afraid Méry may forbid Jeanne to come and see us any more, and that would be so very unfortunate.

"Peyral joins me, my dear son, in loving greetings to you, and we both beseech you to write as soon as ever you can.

"Your old mother, who adores you now as always,

"FRANÇOISE PEYRAL."

Jeanne Méry to her cousin Jean:—

"My dear Jean,

"I am so wretched, do you know, I wish I could die right away. It has made

me too miserable your giving me no answer and never saying a word about coming back soon. And now, to crown everything, father and mother, and godfather too, all want me to marry that Suirot I have told you about before; I am sick of hearing them tell me he is rich, and I ought to feel honoured by his asking for me. Not I! I tell them, you may be sure of that; but I am wearing out my eyes with crying.

"My dear Jean, it makes me very unhappy to have everybody against me. Olivette and Rose make fine fun to see me always with red eyes; I reckon they would be glad enough to marry Suirot, if only he would ask them. Merely to think of such a thing, gives *me* a shiver; no, indeed, I will never, never have him; I tell you I'll go into the convent of Saint Bruno, and escape them all that way, if they push me too far.

"If only I could go to your house occasionally, it would give me fresh courage just to talk to your mother a bit; I respect her and love her as if she were my own mother. But as it is, they look ever so cross because I go there too often, and who knows if they won't forbid my visits altogether before long.

"My dear Jean, you must do everything I am going to tell you to. I understand there are bad stories being told of you; I am sure they are set about only to influence my mind. Mind, I don't believe one word of these fables—they cannot be true, and nobody here knows you so well as I do. All the same I should like you to deny them and tell me how things really stand—and just a word to say you do love me; you know a girl is always pleased to be told that, even when she knows it perfectly well already. Then, write at once to my father to ask leave to marry me; above all, be sure and promise him you will always behave here like a sensible well-conducted man folks can find nothing to say against, when you are my husband. After that, I will beg him on my bended knees to let me have you. May the good God have pity on us, my good Jean!

"Yours for life and death,

"JEANNE MÉRY."

Plain rustic folk find it hard to express the feelings of the heart. Girls brought up in the country often feel very keenly, but words fail them to render their thoughts

and emotions; the elaborate vocabulary of polite passion is a sealed book to them. They can only translate their sentiments by the help of simple, unemotional phrases; that is all the difference.

Jeanne must have felt very deeply to have written the letter she did,—and Jean, who spoke the same simple language, well understood what treasures of love and loyalty were implied by its unadorned sentences. His fiancée's ardour and true-heartedness inspired him with hope and confidence; he put all the tenderness and gratitude he knew how to express into his answer, and addressed a formal demand for his cousin's hand to his uncle Méry, seconded by very sincere and solemn assurances of better behaviour and greater circumspection in the future. This done, he waited without any excessive trepidation the next post from France. . . .

M. Prosper Suirot was a young man of a narrow chest and round shoulders, a limb of the law and withal a free-thinker of the aggressive kind, drivelling shallow atheism

and cheap sarcasm over everything his fathers had held sacred. He was near-sighted with much quill-driving, and his little red ferret eyes lurked behind blue spectacles. Such a rival would have inspired mere pity in a man of Jean's sort, who experienced an instinctive repulsion for all ugly and deformed creatures.

Attracted by Jeanne's fortune and face, the little man thought in his stupid self-importance he was doing the handsome peasant girl only too much honour by offering her his ugly person and contemptible social position. He had even made up his mind that, after they were married, to raise Jeanne to the heights of his own exalted dignity, she should abandon her country coif and wear a hat, like any lady.

* * * * *

III

Six months had gone by,—and the French mails had brought poor Jean, nothing indeed very bad, but nothing very good either.

Uncle Méry was still inflexible,—but

Jeanne was so too, and in old Françoise's letters to her son, the girl never failed to slip in for her lover's benefit a few words of loyalty and love.

Jean for his part was full of hope, and never doubted that, once he was home again, all could easily be set right.

He revelled more than ever in delicious dreams of future happiness. . . . After his five years' exile, his approaching home-coming seemed like a glimpse of heaven. All the poor lonely fellow's thoughts were centred on that glorious moment; he pictured himself climbing with his flowing Spahi burnouse into the diligence for his village, watching the Cévennes come into view, the old familiar outlines of his native mountains, marking each bend of the well-known road, then the dear old church tower, then his father's roof by the roadside, and finally pressing his beloved parents to his breast with a heart-leap of wild delight. . . .

Then, together, the three of them, they would march off to the Mérys. . . . In the village, the good folks, and the pretty

girls, would crowd to their doors to see him go by, and think how fine he looked with his strange uniform and his grand foreign air. . . . He would show his uncle Méry his quartermaster-sergeant's stripes, which they had given him at last,—and who could resist that? . . . He was good-natured at heart, was his uncle Méry; he had scolded him finely in former days, certainly, but he had been fond of him all the time; Jean remembered it all perfectly, and he felt sure of that. . . . Far away, in the land of exile, a man invariably sees under more amiable colours those he has left behind; he remembers them kind and good-natured, forgetting all their faults and angularities and petty spite. Yes, it could not possibly be otherwise; Uncle Méry must give way, when he saw his two children both together on their knees before him; his heart would surely melt, . . . and he would put Jeanne's trembling hand into Jean's! . . . And then, what happiness, what years of sweet peace and pleasure, what an earthly paradise! . . .

* * * * *

All the same, Jean could not quite realize himself dressed like the other village fellows, and least of all wearing the plain country cap. This was a subject he did not care to let his thoughts dwell upon; he would hardly seem the same man to himself, when he had doffed his splendid uniform for his old civilian costume. It was in this red jacket he had learnt what life meant, it was on the soil of Africa he had grown into a man, more so even than he knew. He loved them all—his Arab fez, his sabre, his horse,—the great dismal land he so often cursed, the desert wastes.

He had no notion of the disappointments that sometimes await young fellows, sailors, soldiers, Spahis, when they return to the village they have dreamt of so fondly, the village they left as boys, and which they have seen ever since from far away through a magic glass of bright, prismatic hues.

Alas! what disillusion, what sick weariness and dull monotony, home has often in store for the exiles!

Poor fellows, many a Spahi such as he,

with constitution tempered and debilitated by the African climate, has bitterly regretted the desolate banks of the Senegal. The long, free gallops over the desert, the more independent life, the plenitude of light and the boundless outlook, all these are missed, once a man has grown used to them and then left them behind. Beside the peaceful hearth, a craving rises for the scorching sun of the tropics, the unmitigated heat of Africa, a homesick longing to behold the desert sands once more.

IV

Meantime Boubakar-Segou, the great negro monarch, was giving trouble in the Diambour and the land of Djiagabar. A warlike expedition was in the air; it was talked of in the officers' clubs at Saint-Louis, and discussed and debated over and over again among soldiers and sailors, Spahis, riflemen, and marines. It was the topic of the day, this "little war," in which everybody hoped to get his share of promotion, to win a step, or earn a medal.

Jean, whose service was all but up, promised himself to redeem once for all whatever faults might be found with his past record; he dreamt of tying in his buttonhole the little yellow riband brave men value so, the riband of the military medal for valour; he longed to bid farewell to the black land of exile after some gallant deed that should leave his name for ever green in the Spahis' barrack-rooms, in the far-off country where he had lived so long and suffered so much.

Every day a lively exchange of correspondence went on between the military barracks, the Admiralty offices, and Government House. Every mail brought to the Spahi headquarters great important-looking sealed packets, that set the men in red pondering, and seemed to point to the imminence of a long and serious expedition into the interior. The men set to work sharpening their great service swords and polishing up their accoutrements, with much loud talking and braggadocio, bumpers of absinthe and gallant speeches galore.

V

It was now the early days of October. Jean, who had been on foot since first thing in the morning delivering service papers in all directions, was bound on his last errand, to carry a big, official envelope to Government House.

Half-way down the long straight street, which lay as dead and deserted as a street of ancient Thebes or Memphis, he saw another red-coat coming towards him, holding out a letter. He felt somehow a vague fear, an anticipation of trouble, and hurried to meet the bearer.

It was Sergeant Muller, who was distributing the contents of the French mail to his comrades; this had come in only an hour before by caravan from Dakar.

"Look, one for you, Peyral!" he said, handing him an envelope bearing the postmark of his native village.

VI

The letter, which Jean had been eagerly expecting for the last month, seemed to burn a hole in his pocket. Yet he deferred reading it for the moment, resolving to finish his errand before breaking the seal. He soon reached the gates of Government House, and finding the main gate wide open, he marched in.

The garden was as deserted as the street outside. A huge tame lioness was stretching her limbs in the sun, like a great wanton cat. Some ostriches were asleep on the ground, huddled about a few stiff, blue-grey aloes. Midday—not a soul stirring—a silence of the grave, a series of broad white terraces across which a row of yellow palms cast lines of hard shadow.

Jean looked about for some one to speak to, but seeing no one, stepped into an office room, where he found the Governor sitting surrounded by the different heads of the colonial administration.

There, by way of startling exception, all were hard at work; they seemed to be discussing serious and urgent business at the hour consecrated by tradition to the siesta.

In exchange for the packet of which Jean was the bearer, they handed him another, addressed to the Commanding Officer of the Spahis.

It contained the definite marching orders, which were communicated officially in the course of the afternoon to all the troops at Saint-Louis.

VII

Directly Jean was back in the solitary street, he could restrain himself no longer, and tore open his letter with a quiver of excitement and apprehension.

This time it was all in his mother's hand, the writing more trembling than ever,—and stained with tears.

He devoured the lines; then a sudden dizziness came over him; he put his hands to his head and leant against a wall for support.

* * * * *

It was very urgent, the Governor had said, the despatch he was carrying; he kissed old Françoise's signature fondly, replaced the letter in his pocket, and staggered on like a drunken man.

* * * * *

Could it be really true, this dreadful news? So, it was all over, over and done with for ever! They had robbed the poor exile of his bride,—the girl who had been promised him since boyhood, whom his good old parents had chosen for him!

* * * * *

"The banns are published and the wedding will take place before the month is out. I thought something was in the wind, dear lad, as long ago as last month, when Jeanne left off coming to see us. But I did not like to tell you yet; I did not want to grieve you, as there was nothing we could do.

"We are simply in despair. And now, my dear lad, an idea struck Peyral yesterday that terrifies us both,—that you will not come home at all now, but stay out in Africa altogether.

"We are both of us very old; my good Jean, my dear, dear boy, your poor mother begs you on her knees not to let this make you wild and bad, and prevent your coming back soon, as we expected you would. Otherwise I would rather die right off, and Peyral the same."

* * * * *

A crowd of incoherent tumultuous thoughts surged through Jean's head.

He made a rapid comparison of dates. No, it was not completed yet, not yet an accomplished fact. The telegraph! But no, what was he thinking of! There was no telegraph between France and Senegal. And if there had been, what more could he have urged? If he could have boarded a swift ship, heedless of everything, and set off instantly, and even now arrived in time, if he could have thrown himself at their feet with tears and supplications, perhaps he might yet have turned their hearts. But the distance was too immense . . . the thing was impossible, and he felt his powerlessness! All would be completed before

he could so much as send them a cry of grief and protest.

He felt as if his head were being compressed between two great hands of iron, and his chest crushed in a vice of agonizing pain.

He stopped a second time to re-read his letter; then remembering he was the bearer of an urgent message from the Governor, he folded it up again and went on his way.

* * * * *

Round him was the deep peacefulness of the midday rest. The old Moorish houses lined the streets in formal rows on either side, their milky white contrasting vividly with the intense blue of the sky. Now and again the passer-by would catch from behind their brick walls a negress's sleepy voice crooning some soft, plaintive air, or come across a black nigger boy asleep on a door-step, his little naked belly grilling in the sun, a bead necklace the sum total of his costume, making a conspicuous patch of blackness amidst all this universal brilliance

of illumination. Over the beaten sand of the roadway lizards scuttled in pursuit of each other, waggling their heads absurdly, and tracing with their tails an endless intricacy of fantastic zigzags, as complicated as an Arab pattern. A distant sound of *kousskouss* beaters, as monotonous in its regular thud-thud as silence itself, could be heard from the direction of Guet-n'dar, deadened by the hot heavy air of midday. . .

The peacefulness and calm of exhausted nature seemed wilfully to exasperate Jean's agitation and distress; it weighed on him like some physical oppression of the senses, stifling and smothering him as in a leaden shroud.

Suddenly he beheld all the land of Africa under the aspect of one vast sepulchre.

He awoke as though from a heavy sleep, a five years' nightmare. His spirit rose in fierce revolt,—revolt against all things and all men! Why had they torn him from his village and his mother's side to bury him for the best years of his life in this region of death? . . . By what right had they made

of him that peculiar being, a creature separate and apart from other men, they call a Spahi, a swordsman half African half European, a homeless exile, forgotten of all, —and to end all, betrayed by his promised bride! . . .

A savage anger filled his heart, yet he could not weep; he longed to grip hold of some one or something, to torture and strangle and crush one of his fellow creatures in his powerful arms. . . .

And nothing all around him,—nothing but silence and heat and sand!

* * * * *

Alas! not a friend either in all this land of his sojourn,—not even one true-hearted comrade to tell his troubles to. . . . He was indeed abandoned by God and man! . . . abandoned and alone in the world! . . .

VIII

Jean ran hurriedly to barracks and threw the first man he met the packet he was

entrusted with; this done, he went off on a long, aimless, rapid walk. He strode away straight in front of him, going where chance took him; it was his favourite way of drowning grief.

He crossed the bridge of Guet-n'dar and turned southwards towards the Point of Barbary, the same direction he had followed on the night, four years before, when he had rushed out of Cora's house in misery and despair. . . .

But this time his despair was a grown man's, profound and incurable; his life was broken. . . .

He walked long and far to the southward, leaving Saint-Louis and the negro villages out of sight behind him; finally he sat down exhausted at the foot of a hillock of sand overlooking the sea. . . .

His ideas were broken and incoherent. The hot sun he had been exposed to all day had confused his wits. . . .

He noticed he had never visited this particular spot before, and began to cast his eyes about him idly. . . .

The hillock where he sat bristled with tall strangely shaped posts, bearing inscriptions in the language of the priests of the Maghreb. Blanched bones lay scattered about, which the jackals had disinterred long since. There were some branches of greenery, too, the only vestige of life amid the utter barrenness around,—coils of bindweed, looking very cool and fresh, where they twined amid the dry bones, skulls and arms and legs, and opened their great, pink cups here and there to the sky. . . .

At intervals other burial hillocks rose on the level plain, adding another note to the pervading melancholy.

On the beach flocks of pelicans with red and white plumage were feeding, their apparent size enormously exaggerated by the mirage of distance. . . .

Evening was come at last; the sun had sunk below the sea, and a cooler breeze blew in from the offing. . . .

Jean reopened his mother's letter and began to read it through again. . . .

* * * * *

". . . And now, my dear lad, an idea struck Peyral yesterday that terrifies us both,—that you will not come home at all now, but stay out in Africa altogether.

"We are both of us very old; my good Jean, my dear, dear boy, your poor mother begs you on her knees not to let this make you wild and bad, and prevent your coming back soon, as we expected you would. Otherwise I would rather die right off, and Peyral the same."

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Then, Jean felt his heart break, poor fellow; his bosom heaved with bursting sobs, and all his bitter, rebellious thoughts melted into tears. . . .

IX

Two days later, all the available ships of war were assembled, ready to embark troops for the expedition, to the northward of Saint-Louis, at the great bend of the river, near Pop-n'kior.

The enshipment was effected amid prodigious crowding and uproar. All the

smalahs of the black riflemen, women and children, blocked the river banks, one and all howling and screaming like lunatics. Caravans of Moors, arriving from the farthest corners of the Sudan, drew up to watch the proceedings, with all their camels and leather bags of merchandise and piles of miscellaneous baggage,—and their handsome young slave-girls.

About three in the afternoon, the whole flotilla, which was to push up stream as far as Dialde in Galam, put off with its full complement of troops, and got under way in the stifling heat.

X

Saint-Louis faded away in the distance, the long, regular lines of its buildings sinking and disappearing in faint blue lines upon the yellow sands of the desert. . . .

Either side of the river stretched, as far as the eye could see, great, lonely, unwholesome plains, endless and dismal, and sun-scorched. . . .

Yet this was but the portal of the mighty

desert, the land of desolation and despair, only the vestibule of the infinite African solitudes.

Jean and the Spahi contingent had been taken on board by the *Falémé*, the leading vessel, which was presently to push on a couple of days ahead of the rest of the expedition.

On the very eve of starting he had written a hasty answer to poor old Françoise. He had half intended to write to his fiancée, but on second thoughts had deemed it more becoming not to; but he had poured out his heart to his mother, and done his very utmost to comfort her and restore her peace of mind and hope for the future.

". . . Besides," he wrote, "she was too rich for us anyway. . . . Never fear, we shall find somewhere in the countryside another girl who will not disdain me; we will arrange so as to live together in our old home, and that way we shall be so much the nearer to you. . . . My dear parents, my only thought every day is the happiness I am looking forward to in seeing you again;

three months more and I shall be with you, and I swear I never, never mean to leave you any more. . . ."

* * * * *

Yes, he was firmly determined on that, and never a day passed but he thought of his old father and mother and how truly he loved them. . . . But to share his life henceforth with another woman than Jeanne Méry, this took the colour out of everything; it was an odious thing to consider, and threw a heavy veil of gloom over his return. . . . Do what he might to keep up his courage, he seemed to have no object left in life, he felt as if the future were closed against him for ever.

By his side, on the deck of the *Falémé*, was seated the gigantic Nyaor-fall, the black Spahi, to whom he had confided his sorrow, as to his trustiest friend.

Nyaor found such feelings pretty well beyond his comprehension,—Nyaor, who had never been loved, who possessed under his thatched roof at home three wives he

had bought with his money, and whom he counted upon selling again when they had ceased to please him.

But anyhow he could understand that his friend Jean was unhappy. So he smiled at him amiably, and started telling him a string of negro stories fit to send a man to sleep standing, with the kindly intention of distracting his sad thoughts. . . .

XI

The flotilla made its way up stream with all the speed possible, mooring at sunset and putting off again at dawn.

At Richard-Toll, the first French post, a further contingent of men had been embarked,—to say nothing of Negresses and war material.

At Dagana a two days' halt was made, and the *Falémé* received orders to push on alone for Podor, the last outpost before the land of Galam, where several companies of riflemen were already mustered.

XII

The *Falémé* went steadily on and on, penetrating farther and farther into the endless deserts of the interior, always following the course of the river with its yellow waters flowing between confined banks,—the stream that divides the Moorish Sahara from the vast, mysterious continent inhabited by the negro races.

Jean gazed sadly at the vast solitudes as they passed by in long succession, following with his eyes the ever flying horizons and the sinuous thread of the Senegal River, that vanished behind in the misty distance. These endless levels, rolling past in an infinite series, gave him an impression of poignant melancholy, an indescribable heart-ache,—as if the distances were closing in, closing in, behind him, and he was never to return any more the way he had come.

On the dismal banks here and there stalked solemnly great black vultures or bands of bald-headed *marabous* with curiously human-looking profiles. Sometimes an inquisitive

ape would put aside the undergrowth of mangroves to watch the ship glide by, a slim white egret would dart from a clump of reeds, or a kingfisher, flashing with the hues of emerald and lapis lazuli, would rouse by its sudden flight a huge, lazy cayman lying asleep on the slime.

On one bank, the right, where dwelt the sons of Shem, a village would appear at long intervals, standing solitary amid these vast tracts of desolation.

The presence of these human habitations was always announced from far off by two or three colossal fan-palms, *fetish* trees that guarded the approach.

Towering isolated amidst the bare immensity of level sand, these palms looked like giant sentinels posted on the look out in the desert. Their stems, a rosy grey in colour, very straight and very smooth, swelled outwards in a graceful curve like Byzantine columns, and were topped at the extreme summit by scanty bunches of foliage, each leaf as stiff as so many iron plates.

Then presently, on a nearer approach, an

ant-hill of negro habitations could be made out, groups of pointed huts crowded at the foot of the trees,—a grey mass blurring the yellow sand.

They were often of very considerable extent, these African towns; all were gloomily shut in by thick *tatas*, walls of earth and timber, to defend them against human enemies and wild beasts. A rag of white stuff, floating from a roof a little higher than the rest, marked the residence of the king.

At the gates opening in their ramparts dreary-looking figures could be distinguished, —old chiefs, and aged priests covered with amulets, their long black arms showing conspicuously against their flowing white robes. There they stood watching the passage of the *Falémé*, whose guns, great and small, were ready, on the slightest symptom of hostility, to open fire upon them.

The question would suggest itself what these people lived on amidst the utter barrenness of the surrounding regions, how they existed, and what occupations they followed behind their grey walls, these forlorn folk

who knew nothing of the outside world, nothing but the loneliness of the desert and the merciless sun.

On the north bank, the Sahara bank, more sand, more desolation,—but of a different aspect.

Far away, in the extreme distance, great fires of burning grass, kindled by the Moors, —columns of smoke rising straight up to an astonishing height in the still air. On the horizon, chains of hills literally as red as burning embers, looking, with all these pillars of smoke, like an endless row of colossal flaming braziers.

Yet in the very place where was nothing but drought and burning sands, a constant mirage displayed great lakes, in which all this conflagration shone reflected upside down.

Little quivering wisps of vapour, such as hover above burning furnaces, cast a shifting filmy network over everything, while the mock landscape of the mirage shook and shuddered in the intense heat. Then the scene would change and the country take

new shapes as in a dream, as the eye grew tired and dazzled with the changeful phantasmagoria.

Now and again along this northern shore would appear groups of men of pure white race,—savage and sun-tanned it is true, but with handsome, regular features, and long ringlets that gave them the air of Old Testament prophets. They went bare-headed under the broiling sun, clad in long robes of dark blue. They were Moors of the tribe of the Braknas or Tzarzas, bandits all and thieves, robbers of caravans,—the worst of all the African races.

XIII

The east wind, as it were the mighty breath of the Sahara, had risen little by little, and increased steadily in power the farther they travelled away from the sea.

A dry wind, hot as the breath of a furnace, now blew over the desert, scattering everywhere a fine sandy dust and bringing in its train the burning thirst of the *Bled-el-Ateuch.*

The awnings which protected the Spahis were kept constantly wet; a negro hand was busy all day long with a hose, the jet of water forming rapid fantastic arabesques that disappeared as quickly as they came, vaporized almost instantly in the thirsty atmosphere.

However, Podor hove in sight at last. It is one of the largest towns on the river, and the Sahara bank began to exhibit plentiful signs of life.

It is the threshold of the land of the Douaïch, a Moorish tribe of herdsmen, who have grown rich on the results of their cattle raids into the negro country across the river. They swim their long caravans over the Senegal, driving before them the stolen animals.

Encampments too began to appear on the endless plain. The tents of camel-skin, stretched over wooden poles, looked like great bats' wings extended on the sand, forming odd patterns in intense black on the yellow ground,—always the same uniform yellow.

Everywhere an increase of animation, a quickening of stir and life; along the river banks more numerous groups running up to see the strange sight. There were Moorish women, with handsome copper-coloured faces and scantily clad limbs, wearing coral trinkets on their brows, trotting along astraddle on little humpbacked cows, and often, frolicking after them, children mounted on tiny calves, kicking and struggling,—little brats stark naked, with close-shaven polls, all except a quaint row of tufts like a horse's mane, and bodies as tawny and muscular as young satyrs.

* * * * *

XIV

Podor is an important French post on the south bank of the Senegal River,—and one of the hottest spots in the whole world.

There is a great citadel, its walls blistered and cracked by the sun, while alongside the river runs a fairly shady street, with houses already of some antiquity and of a gloomy aspect. Here are to be seen French *traders*,

yellow with fever and anæmia, and merchants, Moors and Negroes, squatting on the sand; here are to be seen all the varied costumes and all the amulets of Africa, sacks of ground-nuts, bales of ostrich feathers, packets of ivory and gold-dust.

Behind this semi-European street lies a great negro town of thatched huts, divided like a honeycomb by broad straight passage-ways, each quarter fortified with thick *tatas* of timber, forming as it were a separate fortress in itself.

Jean explored the place at evening in company with his friend Nyaor. The mournful chants that rose behind the wall, the strangely accented voices, the unusual look of things, the hot wind that still blew unchecked by the fall of night,—all inspired him with a kind of vague terror, an unaccountable anguish, the joint effect of homesickness and solitude, and hopelessness to boot.

Never before, not even in the remote outposts of Diakhalleme, had he felt so utterly isolated and cut off from the world.

All round the town stretched fields of

millet, interspersed with a few stunted trees, some patches of brushwood and a little grass land.

Opposite, on the Moorish shore, the open, limitless desert began. For all that, at the commencement of a road just begun, but which almost immediately lost itself among the shifting sands to the northward, stood a notice-board bearing the prophetic inscription,—'*Road to Algiers.*'

XV

It was five o'clock in the morning, and the sun, a dull red globe, was just rising over the land of the Douaïch. Jean was returning aboard the *Falémé*, which was making her preparations to get under way.

The negress passengers already lay stretched on deck, wrapped in their many-coloured cloths, packed so close together nothing was visible save a confused mass of garments gilded by the morning light, above which waved sundry black arms loaded with ponderous bracelets.

Jean, as he picked his way through the crowd, suddenly felt himself seized and held by a pair of supple arms, which coiled about his legs like two serpents.

The woman kept her head hidden, and was kissing his feet eagerly.

"Tjean! Tjean! . . ." a little voice with an odd intonation was saying, a voice that sounded strangely familiar,—"Tjean! . . . I followed you for fear you might win Paradise" (might die) "in the fighting!—Tjean! . . . will you not look at your son?"

And the two black arms lifted up a bronzed infant and held him out to the Spahi.

"My son? . . . my son? . . ." repeated Jean, in his rough soldier's way,—but with a voice that shook all the same,—"my son? . . . What yarn is this you are telling me, Fatou-gaye? . . .

* * * * *

"But it's true, true after all," he said, with an emotion he had never known before,

stooping to see, "yes, it's true, after all! . . . why, he is almost white! . . ."

* * * * *

The boy showed scarcely a trace of his mother's blood, he was Jean's child from head to foot. He was bronzed certainly, but as white as the Spahi himself; he had his father's great fathomless eyes, and the same handsome features.—He stretched out his little hands, and looked up, drawing together his little eyebrows with an expression that was already full of gravity,—as if striving to make out what it was he had to do in life, and by what chance his mountain blood of the Cévennes came to be mixed with this impure black breed.

Jean felt himself vanquished by some strange inward influence, some confused and mysterious power; he bent over and kissed his son softly and silently with heartfelt tenderness. Feelings he had never experienced before stirred him to the bottom of his soul.

Fatou-gaye's voice too had awakened in

his heart a host of slumbering echoes; the fever of the senses, the habit of possession, had knotted between these two bonds of such strength and endurance that separation had scarce power to annihilate them.

Then, *she* was faithful to him at any rate, in her own way,—and he, he was so lonely, so lonely and forsaken. . . .

So he let her slip a negro amulet about his neck,—and shared his day's rations with her.

* * * * *

XVI

The ship pursued her course steadily up stream. The river turned more to the southward, and the aspect of the country changed.

Trees and shrubs now lined the banks,—slender gums and mimosas and lightly foliaged tamarisks, interspersed with grass lands and green meadows. Not a trace now of the tropical flora; the vegetation closely resembled the delicate growths of northern climates. Beyond the excessive heat and

utter silence, nothing was left to remind the traveller that he was in the heart of Africa; he might have imagined himself on some peaceful river of Europe.

Yet idylls of negro life were not lacking either. Under the bosky shades, where all Watteau's shepherds and shepherdesses might have found ample room to disport themselves, an amorous pair of African lovers would now and then be seen, man and maid covered with *grigris* and beads, pasturing a few meagre *zebus* or a herd of goats.

Farther on were other herds,—herds no man guarded,—grey caymans, by hundreds, asleep in the sun, their bellies half buried in the steaming water.

Fatou-gaye was wreathed in smiles, her eyes lit up with a wondrous joy. A hundred signs told her she was approaching her own country, the land of Galam!

Still there was one thing made her sadly anxious; every time she came near one of the great grassy swamps, the vast dismal pools surrounded by mangroves, she would

shut her eyes tight,—terrified at the thought of seeing a *n'gabou* (hippopotamus) lift his black muzzle from the stagnant waters,—a sure and certain death-warrant to her and hers.

Impossible to describe all the tricks and wiles, all the arts and artifices, all the persistency and obstinacy, she had employed to get a passage allowed her aboard the ship she knew Jean had been drafted to.

Where had she taken refuge after leaving the Griot woman's house? What hiding-place had she found wherein to give birth to the Spahi's child?

Now indeed she was happy; was she not returning to Galam,—and returning with him?—it was the fulfilment of her fondest dreams.

* * * * *

XVII

Dialde was situated at the confluence of the Senegal and a nameless river flowing in from the south.

There was a negro village at the spot,

an insignificant place guarded by a small blockhouse of French construction, recalling the detached forts in the interior parts of Algeria.

It was the nearest point to the country of Boubakar-Segou, and the appointed place where the French forces were to muster and encamp with the allied army of the Bambaras, surrounded by tribes that still held faithful to their allegiance.

The land was still flat in the neighbourhood, and showed the same monotonous and sterile aspect which characterizes all the countries bordering on the lower Senegal.

Nevertheless isolated clumps of trees were to be found even here, and even some stretches of forest land, to remind the traveller he had just entered the land of Galam and the wooded regions of Central Africa.

XVIII

A preliminary reconnaissance, the first made so far, was ordered and Jean, Sergeant Muller and the tall negro trooper Nyaor

were sent out to the eastward of the camp of Dialde in the direction of Djidjiam.

By what the timorous old women of the friendly tribe had said, fresh footmarks had been seen in the sand of a numerous body of men, foot and horse, which could be nothing else than the army of the great negro king.

For two hours the three Spahis rode their horses over the wide plain in all directions, but without finding any human footmark or the smallest trace of the passage of an army.

To make up, the ground was pitted with the marks left by all the wild animals of the continent of Africa,—from the great round hole the hippopotamus digs with his ponderous foot to the delicate little triangle traced by the tip of the gazelle's flying hoof. The sand, hardened by the last rains of the winter season, preserved with absolute fidelity all the patterns the denizens of the desert had entrusted to its keeping. There were the marks plain to see of monkey's paws, the great ungainly strides of giraffes, the trails

of lizards and serpents, the claws of lions and tigers; there could be traced the stealthy comings and goings of jackals, the prodigous leaps of hunted fawns. All the terrible stir and fierce animation could be divined that follows the oncoming of darkness in the desert, which lies so silent as long as the sun's flaming eye is shining over the wastes; all the nocturnal witches' sabbath of wild animal life could be reconstructed in the imagination.

The three Spahis, as they galloped, put up game of many sorts lurking in the undergrowth; they could have secured a bag to delight the most ardent sportsman's heart. Red-legged partridges rose up almost at the muzzle of their guns, and guinea-fowl, and blue jays and pink jays, and blackbirds with plumage of metallic sheen, and great bustards. But they left them one and all alone,—always hunting for the marks of men's footsteps, but finding none.

Evening was coming on, and heavy banks of vapour began to accumulate on the horizon. The sky had the heavy, solid,

motionless look imagination gives the antediluvian heavens at sunset,—in primitive ages when the atmosphere, hotter and more fully charged with vital substances, brooded above the earth that bore the monstrous germs of mammoths and plesiosauri. . . .

The sun sank slowly amid these sinister-looking mists; his globe grew tarnished, livid, rayless; it lost its roundness, was enormously exaggerated,—then finally disappeared.

Nyaor, who till then had been following Muller and Jean with his usual heedlessness of danger, now declared that to stay longer exploring would be highly imprudent, and that the two *toubabs*, his friends, would be running a foolish risk if they persisted.

In fact, they might be surprised at any moment; peril lurked about them on every side. Moreover, the spoor of lions was fresh and frequent everywhere; the horses began to make sudden halts, sniffing at the five clearly marked claw-marks on the hard sand, and trembling with terror. . . .

Jean and Sergeant Muller held a council

of war and resolved to make for home; and soon the three animals were flying like the wind in the direction of the blockhouse, the white burnouses of their riders waving behind them. In the distance the deep, hollow roar began to make itself heard which the Moors liken to thunder,—the voice of the lion hunting for prey.

They were all three brave men who rode, yet they felt the sort of nervous dizziness that comes of very rapid motion, and shared the contagious panic that sent their mounts galloping so frantically for home. The rushes that bent before their passage, the branches that whipped their legs, seemed like legions of lions of the desert bounding at their heels. . . .

Soon they came in sight of the river which divided them from the French tents and the world of men, and could make out the little Arab blockhouse of the village of Dialde, still illumined by the last red beams of sunset.

They swam their horses across, and re-entered camp.

XIX

It was the evening hour, the saddest of all in that sad land. Sunset brought with it in the far-off African village a peculiar stir and animation. The negro shepherds were driving in their flocks and herds, the warriors of the tribe were making ready for the fight, sharpening their knives and polishing up their prehistoric muskets, the women were preparing a store of *kousskouss* for the army, and milking their sheep and lean *zebus*. A confused murmur of negro voices mingled with the quavering cries of the goats and the plaintive whines of the *laobe* dogs. . . .

Fatou-gaye was there, seated at the door of the blockhouse with her child, still with the same humble and appealing mien she had worn ever since her return.

Presently Jean, whose heart was sick with loneliness, came and sat down beside her and took his boy on his knees; he was touched to see this native family of his, restored to favour and happiness, and to find at far Dialde in Galam some one to love him.

Near by, a company of Griots were reciting war-songs; they sang in low tones in plaintive falsetto voices, accompanying themselves on little guitars of primitive construction,—two strings stretched over serpent skin,—which gave out a thin, sharp tone like the shrilling of locusts. They sang those native airs that match so well with the desolation of the African landscape, and possess a charm of their own in their elusive rhythm and persistent monotony. . . .

Jean's son was a lovely little fellow, with a solemn, serious look and a grave face that rarely broke into a smile. He wore a blue *boubou* and a bead necklace, like any Yolof baby; but his head was not shaved into little pigtails, as the custom is for native children. As he was a little *white boy*, his mother had let his curly hair grow; one little ringlet fell over his forehead, just as it did over the Spahi's. . . .

Jean sat there a long time at the door of the blockhouse, playing with his little son. The last gleams of the fading daylight fell on a very striking and uncommon picture,—the

child with its little angel face, the trooper with his fine soldierlike head, playing together beside the ill-looking black musicians.

Fatou-gaye sat on the ground at their feet, looking adoringly from one to the other, like a dog crouched humbly beside his master; she was lost in a sort of ecstasy before the beauty of her white lover, who had begun to smile upon her again.

He was still very young and boyish, poor lad, as is often the case with young fellows who have led a rough, hard life, and to whom a precocious physical development has early lent a mature and sober look. He was dancing his little boy on his knees with a soldier's awkwardness, bursting out now and again into peals of fresh, merry laughter. . . . But *he* would not laugh a great deal, the Spahi's firstborn; he preferred to put his arms round his father's neck, and nuzzle up against his broad chest, and gaze up at him with great, solemn eyes. . . .

At nightfall Jean installed the pair in safety inside the blockhouse; this done,

he gave Fatou-gaye all the money he had left,—three *khâliss*, fifteen francs! . . .

"Take it," he told her; "to-morrow morning you must buy *kousskouss* for yourself,—and good milk for him. . . ."

* * * * *

XX

Then he set off for the encampment, to turn in and get to sleep himself.

He had first to pass the encampment of the allies, the friendly Bambaras, before coming to the French lines. The night was clear and luminous, filled with a universal hum of insects, swarming in millions, grasshoppers and cigalas, under every blade of grass, in every little hole in the sand. Now the all-pervading sound would swell out, strident and deafening,—as though the whole surface of the ground were carpeted with an infinity of tiny bells and miniature rattles; now the concert would momentarily die away into almost silence, just as if the little creatures had passed the word along to sing softly one and all.

Jean strode on in deep thought,—his mood was eminently thoughtful to-night. . . . Suddenly as he moved along thus pre-occupied, without heeding his steps, he found himself enclosed within a wide circle of dancers, whirling round and round him in measured time. It is the type of dance especially favoured by the Bambaras.

The performers were men of exceptionally tall stature, clad in long white robes and wearing high turbans, also white, with two black horns.

In the luminous dusk the great circle kept revolving slowly and noiselessly,—moving as lightly and airily as a dance of phantoms, a soft rustling of flowing gowns, like the rustle of gigantic birds' pinions, the only sound. . . . The dancers would fall with one accord into a succession of different attitudes,—poising on tiptoe and swaying backwards and forwards, simultaneously throwing out their long arms and extending the thousand folds of their muslin garments like so many filmy, transparent wings.

The tom-tom was beating softly, as

though muffled; the plaintive flutes and ivory horns sounded dim and distant. A weird monotonous music, a sort of magician's incantation, guided the steps of the Bambaras as they circled in the mystic dance.

Then, as they swung past the Spahi, all bowed the head together in sign of recognition, and smiled and said:

"Tjean! come and join the dance! . . ."

Jean recognized them too, almost every one, in spite of their festival costume,—black Spahis or riflemen, who had donned the long white *boubou* of civilian dress and wrapped the *temba-sembe* of high days and holidays about their heads.

Smiling back, he hailed each, as he whirled past: "Good night, Niodagal!"—"Good night, Imobe-Fafandou!"—"Good night, Demba-Taco and Samba-Fall!"—"Good night, comrade Nyaor!" Yes, Nyaor was there too, one of the tallest and handsomest of the crew. . . .

All the same Jean quickened his pace to

escape the long chains of white-robed dancers, that kept winding and unwinding and winding again about him. . . . This dance in the night-time impressed his imagination,—and the strange accompaniment, that sounded like the music of another world. . . .

* * * * *

But the dancers still wheeled round him like sheeted ghosts, reiterating their cry of "Tjean, come and join the dance!"—playfully tormenting their white comrade, lengthening out their tortuous, revolving chain so as to surround him again and again and keep him an unwilling prisoner. . . .

XXI

Once he had lain down under his tent, Jean began to build a host of new plans in his head.

Of course he meant first of all to go and see his old parents; nothing should ever induce him to put that off. But this duty

accomplished, he must surely return to Africa, now he was a father. . . . He felt he already loved his little son with all his heart, that there was nothing in the world could make him forsake the child. . . .

* * * * *

Outside in the camp of the Bambaras could be heard at regular intervals the voice of the Griots chanting on three mournful, long-drawn notes the war-cry of their religion. The screech-owl cries echoed through the sleeping camp, challenging the drowsy negro braves to fight like men and load their guns with many balls, when the day of battle should dawn. . . . That day was evidently near at hand now, and Boubakar-Segou could not be far off.

* * * * *

What was he to do at Saint-Louis, when he came back to father his little lad, after his time was finally expired? . . . Should he re-enlist, or tempt fortune in some bold adventure? . . .

He might turn trader on the river perhaps?—But no, he experienced an invincible repugnance to all trades but working in the fields or following the flag.

* * * * *

All sounds of life were stilled by now in the village of Dialde, and the encampment was as silent as the grave. Far away the roaring of lions could be heard, and the occasional yelp of the jackal—the most lugubrious sound in nature—formed a dirge to accompany the poor Spahi's dreams! . . .

* * * * *

All the same, the presence of the child made a prodigious difference in all his plans, and complicated enormously the difficulties of his future. . . .

* * * * *

"Tjean! . . . come and join the dance! . . ."

Jean lay half asleep, worn out by the long day's reconnoitring, but still pondering over his future course of action. In mental vision

he could still see the dancing Bambaras slowly circling round him, passing and repassing with feeble, flaccid gestures and drooping attitudes, to the sound of a vague, unearthly music.

"Tjean! . . . come and join the dance! . . ."

Their heads, as they bent to salute the Spahi, seemed to drop under the weight of their towering headdresses of state. . . . And lo! they were grinning death's-heads now, corpselike, fleshless faces, that nodded to claim his acquaintance, muttering low, with ghostly smiles,—"T'jean! come and join the dance! . . ."

* * * * *

But presently Jean's head grew heavy with weariness, and he fell into a deep, dreamless sleep,—and he had come to no decision yet. . . .

XXII

The great day was come, the day of battle.

By three in the morning all were awake and astir in the encampment of Dialde;

Spahis, riflemen, Bambara friendlies, were making ready to march out, with arms and warlike stores complete.

The Marabouts had made long prayers, and hundreds of talismans had been distributed among the black troops. The muskets were loaded, by express command of the chiefs, as always on great fighting days, with powder half-way up the barrel, and lead crammed in to the muzzle. So well were the orders obeyed that most of the weapons burst at the first volley, a common enough incident of negro warfare.

They were to advance upon the village of Djidjiam, where the native spies declared Boubakar-Segou to be shut up with his army, behind thick ramparts of timber and mud. Djidjiam was the chief stronghold of this terrible personage, the bugbear of the countryside, the hero of a thousand legends of horror, whose strength lay in flight, in his habit of hiding in the fastnesses of his deadly land, where he lurked beyond the reach of pursuit.

The plan was to encamp in the afternoon under shelter of extensive woods bordering on the enemy's headquarters; then, to make an end by falling at night on Djidjiam, setting fire to the village, which would blaze up in the moonlight like a bonfire of straw, —and then returning in triumph to Saint-Louis, before the fever had had time to do its work in decimating the column.

The day before, Jean had written his old parents a very loving, affectionate letter,—poor pencil scrawl that by now was on its way down river on board the *Falémé*, and could not fail to afford tender comfort to his old mother's heart. . . .

A little before sunrise he kissed his little son, lying sound asleep in Fatou-gaye's arms, and so away to mount his horse.

XXIII

At an early hour Fatou-gaye too set off on an expedition of her own, taking her child with her. Her destination was Nialoumbe, a village of the allied tribe, where lived a

famous Marabout, a priest renowned for his skill in the arts of fortune-telling and prophecy.

She got them to conduct her to the old man's hut. He was a hundred years of age, and she found him lying huddled on his sleeping-mat, mumbling prayers like a dying man to his deity.

They had a long interview however, at the end of which the holy man gave the girl a little leather bag; apparently it held something of the utmost value and she tied it up very carefully in her girdle.

Afterwards the Marabout gave Jean's child a draught to make him sleep; and Fatou-gaye offered the priest in exchange three big silver pieces, the Spahi's last three *khâliss*, which the old fellow put away in his pouch. Then, taking an embroidered waist-cloth, she wrapped up her boy lovingly in its folds,—the child was fast asleep already from the effects of the magic potion,—bound the precious burden on her back, and inquired the way to reach the woods where the French troops were to encamp that evening.

XXIV

The time is seven o'clock in the morning, the scene a remote spot in the country of Diambour. A marsh so choked with vegetation that only a few pools of water are visible, occupies the foreground, a low range of hills bounds the prospect northwards, while at their foot extend as far as the eye can reach the broad plains of Dialakar.

All is silence and desolation, as the sun climbs tranquilly up into the clear sky.

Suddenly the dreary landscape,—which might well have been some lonely stretch of country in ancient Gaul instead of in the heart of Africa,—is peopled by a troop of horse. They sit their steeds gallantly,—fine-looking fellows every one, with their red jackets and blue breeches, and their broad white caps drawn low over sun-bronzed faces.

They are twelve in number, twelve Spahis sent forward as scouts, under command of an adjutant,—and Jean is one of them.

No presage of death, no omen of disaster,

is in the air; the morning sky is calm and pure and peaceful. In the marsh the tall grasses, still wet with the night dews, glitter in the sunshine; dragon-flies with broad wings splashed with black skim its surface; water-lilies open their great white blossoms in the pools.

The heat is already oppressive. The horses bend their necks to drink, sniffing the still water with dilated nostrils. The Spahis call a short halt to discuss their plans, and dismounting, moisten their caps and bathe their heated brows.

* * * * *

Suddenly, far off in the distance, a dull, sonorous thud-thud makes itself heard—like big drums of enormous dimensions beaten all together.

"The great tom-toms!" cried Sergeant Muller, who had more than once had experience of war in negro countries; and with one accord, as if by instinct, all who had dismounted ran to their horses.

But just then a black head emerged from

the long grass surrounding them; an old Marabout waved a signal with his scraggy arm, beckoning with uncanny gestures as if conjuring the reeds of the marsh with some horrid spell—and a hail of lead came beating down on the Spahis.

* * * * *

The shots, carefully and deliberately aimed in the security of the ambush, went home every one. Five or six horses were struck down, and the rest, startled and maddened with terror, plunged wildly, trampling their wounded riders under their hoofs. Jean, amongst the rest, was smitten to the ground with a bullet in the loins.

In an instant thirty ill-looking faces were projected from the long grass, thirty black demons, covered with slime and mud, were leaping on the devoted troop, grinding their gleaming white teeth together, like so many infuriated apes.

Oh! heroic combat that Homer might have sung, but which must remain for ever unknown and unrenowned, like many

another gallant action in the far-away depths of Africa! They performed prodigies of valour, superhuman feats of strength, the poor doomed Spahis, in this supreme hour of their agony. The extremity of the danger inflamed their courage, as is the way with men of natural intrepidity, men born brave; they sold their lives dearly, for were they not all young, and strong, and inured to war? Yet in a few years' time, at Saint-Louis itself, they will be clean forgotten. Who will ever recall their names—the names of those who fell fighting in the land of Diambour, on the plains of Dialakar?

* * * * *

Meanwhile the noise of the great tom-toms drew nearer and nearer.

And lo! suddenly, in the thick of the fight, the Spahis saw, as in a dream, a great negro host speeding past along the line of hills — half-naked warriors, covered with *grigris*, hurrying in the direction of Dialde, racing by in disorderly masses—enormous war-drums, that four men together could

hardly drag with them—bony desert horses, but full of fire and mettle, strangely caparisoned and bedizened with tinsel and copper spangles, long tails and flowing manes both dyed a blood red. Swifter than the wind the fantastic procession passed and was gone —a very devils' dance, a hideous African nightmare!

It was Boubakar-Segou and his warriors on their way to surprise the French column and fall upon it on the march.

The savage king went by without giving a thought to the Spahi scouts, leaving it to the ambushed force to exterminate the troop.

Little by little they were forced back and back, away from the grass and water, out into the barren, arid sands, where a deadlier heat, a fiercer reverberation of the sun's rays, more speedily exhausted their powers of resistance.

There was no time to reload. They fought with knives and sabres, and teeth and nails,—great gaping wounds and bleeding entrails everywhere!

Two black fellows made a dead set at Jean. He was stronger than both together, and sent them sprawling and rolling over in the fury of his rage; but they came on undaunted again and again.

Soon his hands could get no grip of their naked black skins, oily with sweat and slippery with blood,—and he was weakening, weakening from his wounds.

He saw things at last as through a mist,—his dead comrades lying fallen beside him, and the main body of the negro host hurrying past and disappearing, and handsome Fritz Muller writhing in the death agony close by and vomiting blood, and yonder, a long way off already, big Nyaor fighting his way towards Dialde, mowing himself a path through a cloud of blacks with great sweeping strokes of his sabre.

* * * * *

Then three of them together got him down, and turned him over on his side, holding his arms,—and one fellow drove a great knife hard against his breast.

A horrible moment of anguish and suspense followed, in which Jean could feel the point pressing harder and harder against his body. He knew there was never a chance of help, that his comrades were fallen to a man, not one left alive!

The red cloth of his jacket and the stout linen of his coarse soldier's shirt and his flesh together formed a protective layer and stopped the weapon from penetrating; the knife was badly sharpened!

Then the Negro put out all his strength.—Jean gave a loud, hoarse scream, as he felt his side pierced. With a low, dreadful grating sound the blade plunged deep into his chest. Then the fellow turned it about in the wound, and drew it out again with both hands and kicked away the body.

* * * * *

He was the last.—The black devils went their way, yelling their shout of victory; in a moment they were gone, flying like the wind to rejoin the main body of the negro army.

They left the white men lying there alone, —and the peace of death began for them.

* * * * *

XXV

The final encounter of the two armies took place at a point farther on; there were many casualties, though it attracted but little notice in France.

These engagements, fought so far away from home and in which such small numbers are involved, pass unnoticed by the generality of the public; only those remember them who have lost a son or a brother on the field.

The small French force was on the point of breaking, when Boubakar-Segou received, almost at point-blank range, a charge of buckshot in the right temple. The negro monarch's brains spurted out in a white shower, and he sank down, to the sound of the *tabala* and iron cymbals, in the midst of his priests, entangled in the long strings of talismans he wore. It was the signal for the retreat of all his tribes.

The negro host turned tail and made off for the impenetrable regions of the interior. No one opposed their flight; the French were left in no condition to pursue.

The head-band of the great rebel chief was brought back to Saint-Louis as a trophy, —all scorched with powder and riddled with shot.

A long streamer was attached to it, strung with talismans,—little bags variously embroidered and containing mysterious powders and cabalistic designs and prayers in the language of the Maghreb.

The king's death produced a considerable moral effect on the native populations. The battle was followed by the submission of several insurgent chiefs, and might be reckoned as a victory.

The column returned promptly to Saint-Louis; a number of promotions and decorations were duly conferred on all who had taken part in the expedition,—but there were sad gaps in the ranks of the unfortunate Spahis! . . .

XXVI

* * * * *

Painfully dragging himself under shelter of the scanty foliage of the tamarisk bushes, Jean sought out a spot where his head would be in shadow, and settled himself there to die.

He was thirsty,—a terrible, burning thirst; and little convulsive twitchings began to contract his throat.

He had often seen his comrades in African regiments die, and recognized this grim token that the end is near,—which is vulgarly spoken of as the death-rattle.

All the time the blood was flowing from his side, and the parched sand drank it up like dew.

Still, he was in less pain now; except for the thirst, which never ceased to torture him, he suffered hardly at all.

Strange visions passed before the poor fellow's eyes,—the mountain chain of the Cévennes, the familiar scenes of his boyhood, the cottage among the hills.

It was always places of deep shade that predominated in these mental pictures, dark woodlands, moist mosses, and fresh green leaves, and running waters,—and his dear old mother taking him gently by the hand to lead him home, as in the old far-off days.

Ah! yes, it was surely his mother standing there, stroking his brow with her poor old shaking hands, and putting cold water to his burning head!

But . . . dreadful thought!—was his mother never, never to caress him again, was he never to hear her dear voice again? Was this to be the end of everything? . . . Was he to die there, all alone, alone, in the pitiless sunshine, on the desert sands? . . . He half raised himself where he lay, fiercely determined not to die.

* * * * *

"Tjean! come and join the dance!"

In front of him, like a furious whirlwind, like a revolving, tempestuous vortex of the storm, swept a circle of dancing phantoms;

sparks of fire flew upwards, wherever their feet grazed the burning gravel.

Eddying in swift spirals, like smoke driven before the wind, the airy posturers mounted higher and higher, till they vanished in the fiery furnace of the blue ether.

Jean felt himself drawn upwards in their train, as though lifted on the wings of death, and thought the supreme moment was come at last.

But no, it was only a contraction of his tortured muscles, a fierce, agonizing spasm of pain.

A jet of red blood poured from his mouth; and again a voice hissed, hovering at his ear:

"Tjean! come and join the dance!"

Then the pain abated, and he grew calmer, as he sank back once more on his couch of sand.

* * * * *

Recollections of childhood now came crowding through his brain, with an extraordinary vividness. He could hear an old

country ballad his mother used once to sing him to sleep with, when still a tiny youngster in his cradle; then, of a sudden, the village steeple pealed out loudly across the desert the notes of the evening *Angelus*.

Tears coursed down his bronzed cheeks; his prayers of long ago came back to memory, and the poor dying soldier fell to praying with the simple fervour of a little child. He took in his hands a medallion of the Virgin, which his mother had fastened round his neck; he found strength to lift it to his lips, and kissed it with an infinite yearning of affection. He poured out his whole soul to the Virgin of Sorrows, the same to whom his simple-hearted mother used to pray every night for her child. His spirit was all illumined by the radiant hallucinations of the dying,—and aloud, in the deadly silence of the lonely desert, his failing voice repeated the words of doom and mortal parting,

"Farewell, farewell, till our meeting in the skies!"

* * * * *

It was now close on midday. Jean felt less and less pain; the desert, under the intense tropical light, seemed to him one enormous brazier of white fire, the heat of which had no power left to scorch him. Yet his chest heaved as if craving for more air to breathe, his mouth opened as if to ask for water. . . .

* * * * *

And then the lower jaw dropped altogether, the mouth fell open for the last time and remained gaping wide, and Jean died quietly there in the dazzling sunlight.

* * * * *

XXVII

When Fatou-gaye came back from the village of the great Marabout, bringing with her a mysterious object enclosed in a leather wallet, the women of the allied tribe told her the battle was over.

She hurried back to camp panting with anxiety and weariness, stepping in feverish

haste across the scorching sand, bearing on her back her little son, who was still sleeping soundly, wrapped in a blue waist-cloth.

The first man she caught sight of was the Mussulman Nyaor-fall, the black Spahi. He looked at her gravely as she approached, telling between his fingers the beads of his long Maghreb rosary.

Speaking in the language of the country, she jerked out her question—the three words: "Where is he?"—and Nyaor slowly and solemnly raised his arm and pointed to the south of the land of Diambour, towards the plains of Dialakar.

"Yonder!" . . . he replied. "He has won Paradise!" . . .

XXVIII

All day long Fatou-gaye searched feverishly among the clumps of brushwood and the waste, sandy spaces, all the while carrying her little child asleep on her back. Up and down she quested, at times breaking into a run, wild as a panther that has lost

her young — hunting everywhere in the blazing sun, peering into every bush, ransacking every thorny brake.

* * * * *

About three in the afternoon, on a stretch of barren sand, she saw a dead horse lying; then she caught sight of a red-jacket, then another and another. . . . It was the scene of the disaster; here was where the Spahis had been surprised and slain! . . .

Here and there were meagre clumps of mimosas and tamarisk scrub, throwing on the yellow soil a scanty shadow, flecked with sun. Far away, beyond the endless level, rose the outline of a village of pointed huts, showing against the deep blue of the horizon.

Fatou-gaye stopped in shuddering terror. . . . There, lying with arms stiffened and mouth open in the sun, she had recognized him,—and she fell to reciting some weird pagan invocation to the dead, fingering the *grigris* dangling about her black neck.

She stood there a great while, muttering

to herself, with haggard, despairing, blood-shot eyeballs.

She could see a long way off old women of the hostile tribe making for the dead men —and she felt some horrible thing was going to happen. . . .

Presently the hideous old Negresses, their oily skins gleaming in the sun, and diffusing an acrid odour of *soumaree*, crept up to where the young men lay dead, with a rattle of *grigris* and glass beads. They stirred them with their feet, laughing horribly, fingering their persons with obscene gestures, screeching words of mockery and ugly triumph, that resembled the gibbering of apes, as they violated the corpses with ghastly antics like the grotesque figures in some medieval dance of death. . . .

Then they stripped them of their gilt buttons, which they stuck in their own woolly hair; took off their steel spurs, their red jackets, their belts. . . .

Fatou-gaye lay hidden behind her bush, crouched together like a cat ready to spring.

When Jean's turn came, she leapt out with waving arms and nails presented to tear and scratch, uttering wild-beast cries of inarticulate rage, cursing and raving at the foul black creatures in an unknown tongue, . . . while the child, which was awake now, clung to its mother's back, as she stormed and stamped, a terrible figure. . . .

The spoilers of the dead were terrified, and shrunk away. . . .

Besides, their arms were well loaded already with booty; they thought to themselves they could very well come back to-morrow to complete their work. . . . They exchanged some words that Fatou-gaye did not understand, and moved off—turning round once more as they went to salute her with peals of ferocious laughter and monkey-like gestures of mockery and defiance.

* * * * *

As soon as she was alone, Fatou-gaye crouched close by Jean's side, and called him by his name. . . . Thrice over she cried: "Tjean! . . . Tjean! . . . Tjean! . . ."

in thin, shrill accents that rang out through the loneliness like the voice of the ancient priestess hailing the dead. . . . There she cowered motionless under the pitiless African sun, her eyes fixed, without seeing, upon the vast, burning, melancholy distances of the sun-scorched desert,—for she was afraid to look at Jean's face.

The vultures stayed their flight beside her with impudent fearlessness, beating the heavy air with the great fans of their black-plumaged wings. . . . They were hovering hungrily round the bodies,—but dared not touch them yet, they looked too newly dead.

* * * * *

Fatou-gaye caught sight of the medallion of the Virgin in the Spahi's hand, and it showed her he had been praying in the hour of death. . . . *She* had a medallion of the Virgin too and a scapulary, hanging among the *grigris* about her neck,—the Catholic fathers at Saint-Louis had baptized her,—but it was not on these Christian emblems she pinned her faith.

She took an amulet of leather, which years ago, in the land of Galam, a black woman, her mother, had given her. . . . Yes, that was the *fetish* she really loved, and she kissed it fondly.

After that, she bent over Jean's body, and raised his head.

Out of the open mouth, between the white teeth, flew a swarm of blue flies,—and a liquid, already fetid, was dripping from the wounds in the chest.

* * * * *

XXIX

Then she took her child to strangle him.

She could not bear to hear his cries, so she filled the little mouth with sand.

Nor could she bear to see the little face convulsed in the agonized fight for breath; so frenziedly she dug a hole in the ground, and buried his head in it, and covered it over with more sand.

And then, with both hands, she squeezed the child's neck harder and harder, till the

little sturdy limbs ceased kicking in spasms of pain, and fell back at last inert and lifeless.

When the boy was dead, she laid him on his father's breast.

So died the son of Jean Peyral. . . . Strange mystery!—What whim of Providence, what capricious God, had launched him into the world, this child of the exiled Spahi? . . . What had brought him to this earth, and whither was he gone home again now?

* * * * *

Fatou-gaye broke into tears at last,—tears of blood; her wails went echoing in heart-rending tones over the plains of Dialakar. . . . Then she opened the little leather bag the Marabout had given her, and swallowed a bitter paste it contained,—and her death struggle began, a prolonged and cruel agony. . . . A great while she lay gasping in the sun, her throat convulsed with horrible spasms, tearing at her bosom with her nails, plucking out handfuls of hair and amber beads with it, from her head.

The vultures waited round her, watching for the end.

* * * * *
* * * * *

XXX

When the yellow sun set on the plains of Diambour, the death agony was done, the poor child had ceased to suffer.

She lay stretched on Jean's body, pressing her dead son in her stiffened arms.

And the first night descended upon the dead, a hot starry night,—while presently the grim nocturnal revel of wild-beast life began in low, mysterious, muffled sounds through all the length and breadth of the dark African continent.

* * * * *

The same evening Jeanne's wedding procession was passing yonder, on the slopes of the Cévennes, before the cottage door of the old Peyrals.

* * * * *

XXXI

APOTHEOSIS

At first a sort of far-off wail, it sounds from the farthest extremity of the desert; presently the grim concert draws nearer in the transparent dusk—hideous yelping of jackals, shrill mewing of hyænas and tiger-cats.

* * * * *

Poor mother, poor old bereaved mother! . . . That human form, just visible in the doubtful gloom, stretched there in the vast solitude, the mouth open under the starlit sky, asleep at the hour when the wild beasts leave their lairs, asleep never to wake again,—ah! poor mother, poor old mother! that lonely, forsaken corpse—is your son! . . .

* * * * *

"Jean! . . . come and join the dance!"

The famished horde creeps up softly in the night, prowling round the brakes, crawl-

ing through the long grass; by the light of the stars it falls upon the young soldiers' carcases; and the horrid feast begins, the feast decreed by blind natures's ordinance,—every living thing feeds, under one form or another, on the thing that is dead.

* * * * *

The man still holds in his sleeping hand his medallion of the Virgin—the woman her leather *grigri*. . . . Oh! keep good watch and ward, ye cherished amulets!

* * * * *

To-morrow great bald-headed vultures will continue the work of destruction,—and their bones will be scattered about the sand, dragged hither and thither by all the beasts of the desert,—and their skulls will bleach in the sun, ransacked by the wind and the locusts.

* * * * *

Aged pair, who sit waiting, waiting at the chimney-corner at home,—the old father bent

with years, dreaming of his son, the handsome lad in the red coat, the old mother, praying at evening for her absent boy,—aged parents, who sit and wait, never more shall ye see your son in this world, never more behold the Spahi return! . . .

* * * * *